

# KAMPUCHEA:

## The Revolution Rescued



by Irwin Silber

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## PREFACE

In an immediate sense, this book has its origins in a one-month trip to Indochina which Ann Schwartz and I made in September, 1984, on behalf of the newspaper *Frontline*. During that time, it became clear to us that the one issue, above all, which continued to rivet the attention of all political forces in the region was the "Kampuchea question." We also realized that the world to which we would shortly return knew very little about Kampuchea, most especially its recent history and current reality.

Considering that Kampuchea has been designated one of the flashpoints in U.S. hopes for reasserting its global power, perpetuation of the current myths and prejudices about that country is extremely dangerous. For these provide an ideological climate in which various forms of U.S. military intervention appear to have both a political and a "moral" justification — not only in Indochina but in other parts of the world where imperialist-supported "freedom fighters" are being used to counter the tide of national liberation and socialism.

Chief among these myths is that a starvation-ridden Kampuchea today writhes under a detested Vietnamese "occupation" which is itself but the most glaring example of a dangerous plan by the government in Hanoi to conquer all of Southeast Asia. Washington's vested interest in promoting such a view ought to be warning enough that its version of events in the region should be treated with considerable caution. But the elevation of anticommunist ideology to something approaching a state religion in the U.S. today has created a climate in which all manner of nonsense — no matter how lacking either

in evidence or internal consistency — stands a good chance of becoming “common knowledge” so long as its point is the vilification of countries and movements who stand opposed to U.S. policy and interests.

As a result, what little is known in this country about Kampuchea’s recent history and present reality is, for the most part, based on the conveniences of U.S. foreign policy objectives and the self-serving accounts of those who, with the help of the U.S. and China, are trying to overthrow the present government in Phnom Penh.

Typical of this mythology is the charge that Kampuchea is today being “Vietnamized” — culturally, socially and economically — to the point where it has virtually lost its own identity. Inherent in this accusation is that a similar fate awaits the other countries and peoples of Southeast Asia (and beyond!) unless the Vietnamese are stopped now. The point of all this is twofold: to justify a policy of *continued U.S. intervention in Indochina*; and to prepare the way for future U.S. intervention elsewhere when, as is bound to happen sooner or later, unjust social arrangements and oppressive regimes are challenged by popularly supported revolutionary movements.

On our return home, therefore, Ann and I wrote a series of articles which appeared in *Frontline* in late 1984 and early 1985 in which we attempted to convey not only what we had seen for ourselves but a somewhat broader overview of the political and social dynamics presently at work in Kampuchea. The regimen of a newspaper format, however, clearly does not permit the level of extended political analysis, theoretical reflection or historical background that ultimately is required if the complex reality of Kampuchea is to be understood.

In order to establish a frame of reference capable of challenging the mythology, a more extended work was in order. This book represents such an effort.

This is not the first attempt to provide an alternative to the official view on Kampuchea. In recent years, a small number of scholars and journalists have begun to penetrate this curtain of lies and silence. These writers, most notably Ben Kiernan and the late Wilfred Burchett, have made invaluable contributions to uncovering and documenting recent chapters in Kampuchea’s political history which have long been obscured or

misrepresented. This book is immensely indebted to their work. In so far as the facts are concerned, I do not make any claim on providing a whole body of new information hitherto unavailable.

Rather, what I have attempted to do is to build upon this body of existing work — supplemented by interviews and first-hand impressions obtained in Kampuchea and Vietnam — to provide a broader historical explanation of the events which have shaped Kampuchea’s recent history; and, in particular, to situate Kampuchea’s revolution — especially the internal contradictions which beset it during the years of Pol Pot’s ascendancy in the Kampuchean communist movement — in the context of the fierce political and ideological struggles which have wracked the international communist movement over the past three decades.

In undertaking such an effort, let me make my own partisanship clear. At the risk of reducing a complex worldview to a reified phrase, the framework I attempt to bring to bear on this work is based ideologically in Marxism-Leninism. From that vantage point, I believe that while the revolutions in the countries of Indochina are rooted — as they inevitably must be — in the concrete conditions of each, they cannot be fully understood outside the context of a revolutionary process which, ever since the Russian Revolution of 1917, has begun to effect a law-governed historical transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale. This process encompasses three distinct yet interdependent revolutionary movements: the struggle to construct and defend socialism in a growing number of countries concentrated in the socialist camp; the intensifying struggle to drive out imperialism and achieve national liberation in the oppressed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America; and the revolutionary struggle of the working classes in the most developed capitalist countries (still more potential than actualized) to free themselves from capitalist bondage.

Bourgeois scholarship maintains, virtually as an article of faith, that partisanship of this kind cannot help but undermine the integrity of the work it produces. Acknowledged or not, however, and consciously or otherwise, every work of political analysis proceeds from an ideological framework; the only question is which one.

But it does not necessarily follow that political partisanship will inevitably lead to misrepresentation. Admittedly it often does, and unfortunately not only by those whose inclinations rest with the defense of the existing order. Marxists are not, by definition, immune from such a tendency. Nevertheless, the revolutionary function of Marxism is poorly served when history and theoretical rigor are sacrificed to what may appear to be the momentary uses of convenient oversights or unfounded optimism. For ultimately the soundness of the strategy and tactics of any revolutionary movement is thoroughly dependent on precise and informed assessments of objective reality. And this applies as much to the international supporters of a cause as to the leaders of such a movement themselves.

In the case of Kampuchea, Marxism requires a scrupulously honest account and assessment of the contradictions which historically emerged within its revolutionary process. For it is probably on the Kampuchean question, more than any other, that the contradictory perspectives and assessments of Maoism and Marxism-Leninism have come face to face, not just in a theoretical fashion, but on the battlefield. On this terrain, a thorough understanding of the history of the Kampuchean communist movement, the nature of the Pol Pot regime, the relation of the Kampuchean revolution to the Vietnamese revolution, and the general perspective of the present Kampuchean government and party will have a significance that extends beyond Indochina.

Under any circumstances, consideration of the historical role played by Maoism would be unavoidable in a serious political analysis of the Kampuchean revolution. But it is only appropriate to note in this case that such an approach is also motivated by certain compelling personal considerations.

My own political history includes a period in which many of the theoretical concepts advanced by Mao Zedong and key elements in the broad political framework enunciated by the Communist Party of China were extremely attractive. Because during that period — roughly 1972-1974 — and for some time beyond, I was the executive editor of the *Guardian* newspaper and one of its main political writers, the consequences of that attraction found their way into print and unquestionably con-

tributed to making Maoist ideology something of a current on the U.S. left. In retrospect, it is quite embarrassing and often painful to recall — and occasionally reread — the political exuberances of that time, including my own. However, in trying to understand not only my own history but the causes of a broader political phenomenon, I am convinced now that the relatively brief period of apparent Maoist vitality in the U.S. had more to do with a hope that Maoism might offer the U.S. left at long last a way out of its perennial political cul-de-sac than with the actual policies being advanced either by the Communist Party of China before the international communist movement or certainly by U.S. Maoism.

It would be a serious error, I think, for those on the left who have come to understand the fundamental flaws of Maoism — and even more so for those who were never particularly influenced by it — to ignore or underestimate its appeal during the period of its greatest influence. At a time when U.S. imperialism was being challenged and set back by revolutionary armed struggle in different parts of the world, Maoism seemed to be more at home with the spirit of those so engaged than did much of the "old left." Maoism also seemed to be more in tune with the most militant currents which the mass movements and ideological upheavals of the 1960s had generated. While the traditional expressions of U.S. communism remained locked into an ideological construct which insisted that "labor" (meaning the trade union movement) "must lead," Maoism seemed to offer the possibility of harnessing the mass radicalization of the '60s to a broader global and historical process. In short, Maoism seemed to offer a revolutionary alternative to the inertia of the "old left" and a Marxist alternative to the spontaneity of the "new left" while remaining true to the best in both these tendencies.

Small wonder, then, that many revolutionary-minded people, myself included, hoped for a time that Maoism would be the force to revitalize Marxism on the U.S. political landscape. Clearly that hope was misplaced. And those of us who pursued that vision certainly must take responsibility for contributing to an ideological disorientation whose effects may still be felt today.

It must also be said that for me — and, I suspect, for many

others — the very lures of Maoism ultimately proved its undoing. For those of us who saw in the Cuban revolution the most daring challenge to imperialist hegemony in the western hemisphere and in the struggle in Vietnam the potential for a revolutionary victory that would rock the very foundations of the world imperialist system, Maoism's appeal rested on what appeared to be its consistent and militant anti-imperialism. Seeing the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions as the touchstones of the international class struggle, we were attracted to Maoism largely because it seemed to elevate these experiences to a broader revolutionary theory.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that doubts about Maoism should appear when China — following the logic of Mao's "Theory of the Three Worlds" — became openly hostile to both the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions. Certainly with hindsight one can find considerable evidence indicating Maoism's subsequent political trajectory even before that turn — most especially in the anti-Sovietism which seems to have been the common thread linking Mao's super-revolutionary "Red Guards" with the Deng Xiaoping "capitalist roaders." But theoretical inconsistencies have a way of remaining subject to a variety of interpretations until they finally make their real meaning felt in the realm of politics.

I think this was the case for many of us who were caught up in the uncertain eddies of Maoism in the early '70s. One reason for this, I believe, is that Maoism's inexorable pull toward the class collaborationist politics which were to surface later in the decade was held in check by the war in Vietnam. Especially in the later years of the Vietnamese revolution, it seems clear that the overriding concern of China's leaders was to make sure that an explicit U.S. military presence on their southern border would be terminated. And until the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam after the conclusion of the 1973 Paris agreements, that consideration remained primary. It is no accident, therefore, that the full political blossoming of Maoist politics in the international arena did not occur until after U.S. troops departed. (There is a substantial body of evidence to show that in the period from 1973 to 1975, Chinese leaders had displayed increased vacillation and even outright opposition to the struggle to liberate South Vietnam.)

In any event, the Vietnamese victory had barely been secured when events took place which forced many of us into a serious reassessment of Maoist ideology. The first such event was the Angolan revolution, which reached a critical turning point in the fall of 1975. Three groups which, in various degrees, had participated in Angola's anti-colonial struggle were vying for power: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which had initiated the armed struggle in the early 1960s and which enjoyed the backing of all the socialist countries (with the notable exception of China) and the great majority of African countries; the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), in whose fortunes the CIA had invested heavily; and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), a group which even then was coordinating its actions and cooperating with South Africa.

With the U.S. and South Africa hatching plans to keep Angola safely in the Western camp — a strategy which required preventing the MPLA from taking power — South Africa mounted an invasion of Angola from the south and the MPLA requested and obtained the assistance of Cuban troops. Here, for almost the first time, was a crucial *open* test for Maoist politics. The issues could not have been more clear-cut. On one side was a genuinely popular revolutionary movement with impeccable anti-imperialist credentials supported by the armed forces of that irascible thorn in Washington's side, the Cuban revolution. On the other were "anti-colonial" groups of dubious origin armed and supported by the most odious regime on the African continent and by the world's imperialist center.

China's choice — echoed by its Maoist adherents in the U.S. and elsewhere — was to denounce the Cuban troops as "mercenaries for Soviet social imperialism" and to criticize the MPLA for not "sharing power" with the imperialist-backed movement.

No one who was active in U.S. left politics at the time can fail to recall the bitter polemics which broke out. For me and for the *Guardian* it proved to be an initial but nevertheless decisive rupture with Maoism. Open debate on the implications of China's foreign policy erupted in the pages of the *Guardian* and in every section of the left which to any degree had felt the tinge of Maoist ideology.



On behalf of the *Guardian* I undertook a national speaking tour on the Angola issue, in the course of which my own sense of the far-reaching political and theoretical implications of China's stand began to ripen. China's Angola policy, I believed, could not be seen simply as a "mistake." It was the inevitable consequence of a political and theoretical framework which, it seemed to me, must itself be fundamentally flawed.

Nevertheless, for many who had been under the influence of Maoism, the disengagement process was not short or simple. Layer upon layer of assumptions, built up over the course of many years, had to be stripped away and re-examined. In 1978, several of us who subsequently participated in launching the Line of March political organization began a study project with the aim of developing a critique of one of the most fundamental tenets of the Maoist framework — the thesis that capitalism had been restored in the Soviet Union. In the same period, many others on the left were beginning to review the negative effects that Maoist ideology had on a multitude of political lines and practices of its adherents.

It was at this point that yet another concrete expression of the international class struggle thrust the nature of Maoist ideology into sharp political relief: the events in Indochina in 1978 and 1979 which surrounded the activities of the Pol Pot regime and culminated in the rescue of the Kampuchean revolution by Vietnamese troops, followed quickly by China's large-scale military assault on Vietnam.

In many respects, the clash in Indochina posed far greater political complexities than did the struggle in Angola. For one thing, the struggle in Angola in 1975 appeared, on the surface at least, to be principally internal — that is a conflict between different factions of the anti-colonial movement — with "outside forces" only intervening later on. In Kampuchea, on the other hand, the contention, while internal to the Indochinese revolutionary process, nevertheless pitted the armed forces of one socialist country, Vietnam, against the ruling parties of two others that claimed to be socialist, Pol Pot's Kampuchea and China. In addition, in Angola, the claims of the FNLA and UNITA as legitimate revolutionary groupings were quickly dispelled by their close involvement with and dependence on the U.S. and South Africa respectively. In Kampuchea, how-

ever, Pol Pot held the banner of the "communists," having earlier captured control of the Kampuchean Communist Party. Finally, in Angola, the role of the U.S. and South Africa made the political stakes in the struggle virtually self-evident to anyone claiming an anti-imperialist vantage point. In Kampuchea the main reactionary back-up role was played by China, a socialist country, with the U.S. remaining very much in the background.

For these reasons, the events in Indochina in 1979 once again provoked a major controversy in left circles — even among those who had already begun to question Maoism's political thrust and basic premises.

This problem surfaced with particular intensity in the *Guardian* early in 1979. Differences with the *Guardian's* judgment of the events in Kampuchea — particularly its criticism of Vietnam — led to the resignations of several staff members, among them the paper's longtime correspondent Wilfred Burchett, Frances Beal and Abe Weisburd. In my case, the political differences over Indochina intersected with and more sharply focused a number of other political differences which had been developing for some time. Forbidden from offering an alternative view of the struggle in Indochina in the pages of the paper, I undertook a national speaking tour and wrote a small pamphlet, *The War In Indochina*, in which I advanced a position in support of the Vietnamese and openly criticized the line of analysis put forward by the *Guardian*. A short time later, my eleven-year relationship with the *Guardian* came to an end. (Some years later, it should be noted, the *Guardian* altered its view of events, ultimately concluding that its initial judgment had been wrong and that the actions taken to depose Pol Pot were justified.)

For myself and many others, this second critical political test of Maoism was a convincing demonstration of the need not only to consolidate the initial break with Maoism but to deepen it by a more careful analysis of the main propositions on which the Maoist framework rested. The concentrated results of that effort can be seen in a number of analytical articles published in the first dozen issues or so of the theoretical journal, *Line of March*. While the present work undertakes a highly focused political and historical analysis of the Kampuchean revolution,



it is also part of that larger enterprise. Its premise is that Kampuchea's recent history provides one of the most concentrated examples of Maoism in practice — and that the left debate over this history offers telling insights into the theoretical premises that form the basis for Maoism's claim to being a Marxist ideology.

The effort to situate this book at such a level was aided immeasurably by the opinions and criticisms of a number of other people in *Line of March* who reviewed sections of the manuscript and, in some cases, aided with research. In particular, however, I want to acknowledge the contribution made to this undertaking by my co-editor of the *Line of March* journal, Bruce Occeña. His careful scrutiny of the manuscript and the numerous additions and refinements he made in it — to say nothing of his own political and theoretical contributions to the development of our collective critique of Maoism over the past several years — have left an invaluable imprint on every page of this work.

This study of the "rescue" of the Kampuchean revolution has been a sobering experience for me. Most especially it has underscored the extent to which my own "rescue" from Maoism — minor though that event may be on the scale of history — remains in debt to the courage and consistency demonstrated by the communists of Vietnam as, over the course of 40 years, they have lived up to the awesome tasks history has imposed on them.

Irwin Silber  
Oakland, California  
February, 1986

# KAMPUCHEA: The Revolution Rescued

## Introduction

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Implicit in the title of this book is a positive political assessment of a particular historical development — the forcible ouster of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea in 1979 and its replacement by the present government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). As the title suggests, I believe that this action was an absolutely unavoidable first step in an attempt to rescue the Kampuchean revolution from the disaster which had overtaken it during the course of Pol Pot's domination of the Kampuchean communist movement.

I have focused the "rescue" particularly on the Kampuchean *revolution*, rather than on the people or the country as a whole, in order to underscore the political rather than simply the humanitarian dimensions of those events leading up to and subsequent to January 7, 1979, the day the Khmer Rouge regime fled a deserted Phnom Penh and the world began to learn what had actually transpired in Kampuchea over the course of the previous 39 months.

Likewise embodied in this assessment is a polemic directed against a wide range of views on the left concerning that crucial turning point in the class struggle in Indochina.

Some are bound to look askance at the choice of a polemical method. Therefore an opening word on that point may be necessary. Marxist methodology in general tends toward the polemical precisely because Marxism is, at its best, a partisan and engaged science whose purpose is not merely reflection but action. In fact Marxist theory developed philosophically as a critique of contending bourgeois theories concerning the historical direction and instruments of revolutionary change.

Marxism's theoretical legacy, therefore, is replete with works of an explicitly polemical nature — from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* and Engels' *Anti-Duhring* to Lenin's *Imperialism and State and Revolution*. And, as the communists increasingly take responsibility for the class struggle as it actually occurs in history, political polemics with other forces on the left who have differing assessments of the same events cannot help but proliferate. No force on the left which shies away from such polemics can ever hope to establish a vanguard relationship with the most politically advanced elements in the working class, and ultimately with the class as a whole.

Few recent events in the international class struggle are more pregnant with polemics than developments in Kampuchea. Any serious attempt by the communists to offer an assessment of developments affecting that country must take on the very real polemic which erupted at the time of Pol Pot's ouster and which, in a variety of forms, continues to echo today.

### The Debate's Terrain

The immediate point of controversy, of course, concerns whether or not Vietnam was justified in taking military action to oust the Pol Pot regime. Those who say that the Vietnamese were not justified generally argue one or more of the following propositions:

First, Vietnam's aim in ousting Pol Pot was the conquest and political domination of Kampuchea, the crucial first step in a Soviet-backed scheme for regional hegemony which poses a threat to other countries in Southeast Asia as well.

Second, the great virtue of the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP) under the leadership of the Pol Pot faction was that it was based on the principles of self-reliance and defense of national sovereignty — and that it fought for those principles against a tendency (fostered by the Vietnamese communists) within the Kampuchean party to subordinate the Kampuchean revolution to the Vietnamese revolution.

Third, the line of the KCP on socialist construction during this period was "a staunch and vigilant anti-revisionist" line (Heder, 1978, p.7.) which represented a revolutionary critique of

"revisionist" Soviet and Vietnamese "models" for building socialism.

Fourth, regardless of whatever may have been wrong with the line or practice of the KCP under Pol Pot, for Vietnam to send its armed forces into Kampuchea in order to establish a government more to its liking was an unpardonable violation of the principle of national sovereignty.

The present work is, in essence, a polemic directed against these propositions and the political conclusions that flow from them. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to demonstrate not only that the Kampuchean revolution, under Pol Pot's leadership, became a grim caricature of socialism, but that the KCP became a dangerous renegade force which brought the Kampuchean nation to the brink of destruction while also posing an immediate and pressing danger to the stability of the revolution in the other countries of Indochina, especially Vietnam. I will also try to show that the very arguments used by Pol Pot and his supporters to "prove" that Vietnam — for its "own" reasons as well as on behalf of the Soviet Union — is bent on regional expansionism, are themselves reflections of a deep-seated, bourgeois nationalism brought into the Kampuchean communist movement by Pol Pot and the forces grouped around him. For these reasons, Vietnam's actions in providing the decisive military strength needed to oust Pol Pot and to prevent his regime from returning to power represent a necessary defense of the Indochinese revolution as a whole and, in particular, constitute a timely rescue of the Kampuchean revolution.

More precisely, the thesis advanced and documented in the pages that follow is that the general line of the KCP under Pol Pot was rooted in two major deviations from Marxism-Leninism: a narrow, chauvinist, national exclusivist conception of the Kampuchean revolution which violated one of the fundamental laws of the revolution in the countries of Indochina — the indivisibility of the revolutionary process that history and objective conditions have imposed on the three Indochinese peoples; and an ultra-left, idealist conception of a peasant-based egalitarian socialism which has nothing in common with historical materialism and which attempted artificially to impose on Kampuchea a "new society" outside of history.

It will also be shown that Pol Pot's general line represented a

radical break with the main line of development of the Kampuchean communist movement and was fiercely opposed by major sections of that movement; in fact, that it was only after the brutal liquidation of all opposition within the KCP that this line was able to be fully implemented.

### The Debate's Importance

My purpose here is neither academic nor to rake up old arguments for their own sake. For over half a century Indochina has been a critical battlefield in the international class struggle. And in many ways it still remains so today, ten years after U.S. imperialism's ignominious defeat — testimony to the intractable nature of imperialism's determination to seek out every point of vulnerability in the revolutionary and socialist camp.

In the case of Indochina, this relatively "normal" post-revolutionary expression of the class struggle — an imperialist counterattack — was able to exploit two noteworthy factors particular to the revolution in that region.

One is the fact that although the Indochinese revolution was victorious as a qualitatively single process on a common battlefield, it unfolded through distinct national forms. As a result, the renegade political force which developed from within the revolutionary process itself — the Pol Pot faction of the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP) — was able to carry through its line from the vantage point of state power.

The second is the fact that the Indochinese revolution — for reasons which will be explored subsequently — encountered active hostility from its powerful socialist neighbor, the People's Republic of China. As a result, "normal" imperialist efforts to undermine the revolutionary victory acquired an extraordinary, on-the-spot military force willing to take main responsibility for the enterprise and lend it a modicum of "socialist" legitimacy.

These two factors had combined to make Kampuchea the weak link in the Indochinese revolution even before 1975. The transformation of the KCP into a Maoist party in the mid-1960s had produced serious strains on the Indochinese revolution even during the most intense points of struggle against U.S. aggression. This was intensified from 1975 to 1979 when

Pol Pot's disastrous social policies began to undermine the material and social basis for the Kampuchean revolution.

Today Kampuchea continues to be the focal point for imperialist-inspired, counter-revolutionary intrigue directed against the countries of Indochina. The re-established Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) and the Kampuchean masses — assisted by Vietnam, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries — have performed what even many anti-communist Western observers acknowledge is a "miracle" of social and economic revival, particularly in view of the fact that China, the U.S. and Thailand continue to supply and host a counter-revolutionary war along the Thai-Kampuchean border.

That war is, in essence, the same war that the revolutionary peoples of Indochina have been fighting for the past 50 years. To be sure, there have been some shifts in the cast of characters. The old colonial overlords, the French, have long since departed their Indochina "graveyard." People's China, once a crucial ally of the Indochinese peoples' struggles against France and the U.S., now sees its own "national" interests better served by attempting to keep the revolutionary governments of Indochina weak and divided and by maintaining its alliance with the U.S. But the underlying conflict remains the same. The revolutionary movements of Indochina which for almost three generations have held down one of the decisive battlefronts of the world struggle against imperialism, are still arrayed against their same basic foe, imperialism headed by the U.S., aided by the now-ousted and embittered reactionaries of the three countries.

And in terms of the future of Indochina, the stakes are also still essentially the same: will this region develop and consolidate as an outpost of socialism in Southeast Asia, or will it once again be subordinate to the interests of imperialism?

This consideration alone would make a clear political understanding of the present struggle in Kampuchea of the utmost importance for us. But there are other considerations which make an understanding of this particular issue and the class forces involved in the Kampuchean struggle today of special significance to the U.S. left.

One is the fact that the Kampuchea issue is being con-

sciously — and extravagantly — used by the U.S. ruling class to undo the “Vietnam syndrome” which has been a significant fetter on imperialism’s freedom of military action elsewhere in the world. A *Wall Street Journal* (August 15, 1984) commentary, for instance, notes that “President Reagan’s objective of trying to prevent communist takeovers in Central America is being most vigorously opposed . . . by people who were part of, or inspired by, the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s.” Citing the case of Kampuchea, the article goes on to state, “It is time that the halo of moral purity be removed from the heads of those who vilify an anticommunist policy in Central America and invoke the Indochina experience as justification.”

In a similar vein, *U.S. News and World Report* sees active U.S. support for the Kampuchean counter-revolution as “the end of the Vietnam syndrome that has paralyzed America for 10 years.”

With leading ruling class ideologists having so clearly stated *their* stakes in the Kampuchean debate, their political opponents cannot afford to lose that debate by default.

Two, the present struggle around Kampuchea is probably the most politically intense expression of the remaining contradiction between Maoism and Marxism-Leninism anywhere in the world today.

Maoism’s wrenching break with the socialist camp, its ideological assaults on the Soviet Union, its rupture of the international anti-imperialist front, its increasingly explicit alliance with the U.S., and now its leading role in attacking the Indochinese revolution all provided a lifeline to U.S. imperialism precisely at the moment when it was enduring major defeats, particularly in Asia.

The revolutionary triumph in Indochina — in particular, the victory in Vietnam — has helped undo much of the Maoist damage. It has served to re-establish the revolutionary vitality of Marxism-Leninism throughout East Asia, offering an alternative to the narrowly nationalist and frequently ultra-left conceptions which Maoism had brought into the communist parties and revolutionary movements in a number of Asian countries. In this sense, the defense of Marxism-Leninism as the fundamental line of the revolution throughout Asia is also

at stake in the Kampuchea debate.

Finally, the debate over Kampuchea is unfortunately not yet a “settled” question in our movement. While many who were among the most vocal in their denunciations of the Vietnamese actions in 1979 have since thought better of their earlier positions, their line adjustment has usually been made in an extremely pragmatic fashion that does not address forthrightly the basic historical and ideological issues embodied in the polemic. And there are even some — the diehard Maoists, to be sure, but others as well — who continue to muddy the Kampuchean question with historical misrepresentation, factual nonsense, and gross distortions of Marxist theory.

It is with these active debates in mind that the present work has been focused.

Following this introductory section, Chapter Two traces the historical development of the Kampuchean revolution from 1930 to 1975 as a polemic with the Maoist charge that throughout this period a central goal of the Vietnamese communists was to subordinate the Kampuchean revolution to its own “hegemonic” interests. In particular, this section discusses the origins and significance of the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party, the call by that party for a future “Indochina Federation,” the political controversy surrounding the 1954 Geneva agreement on Indochina, the differences between the Vietnamese communists and the Pol Pot faction of the KCP concerning the armed struggle against Prince Sihanouk in the mid-1960s, and the conflicts between these same forces in the period immediately preceding Pol Pot’s seizure of state power.

Chapter Three details and assesses the policies of the Pol Pot regime during its years of state power from 1975 to 1979. This includes an analysis of the political questions underlying the growing military confrontation between Vietnam and Kampuchea during these years. It also reviews and analyzes Pol Pot’s conception of an “anti-revisionist” model of socialist construction in Kampuchea. And finally, there is a discussion and documentation of the fierce struggle *internal to the Kampuchean communist movement* which raged in those years.

Chapter Four takes up the “rescue” of the Kampuchean revolution and the controversy which continues to surround that process. Here the charges leveled by both imperialist and Mao-

ist ideologists of Vietnamese colonization and exploitation of Kampuchea are discussed. This polemic frames a discussion of how the KPRP is unfolding its general line on the four central questions facing the Kampuchean revolution: Kampuchea's social and economic revival, the struggle against the armed counter-revolution, the long-range perspective on laying the foundations for socialism, and the relationship between the three Indochinese countries.

Chapter Five is a "theoretical postscript" which undertakes to discuss the Marxist point of view on the question of "national sovereignty" — do communists support it as an "absolute" principle or do they see it as "limited" by other political considerations? — and how this applies to the class struggle in Indochina historically and at the present time.

## 2

## Historical Development Of The Kampuchean Revolution

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In July, 1975, just a few months after Khmer Rouge forces ousted the U.S.-backed Lon Nol government and captured Phnom Penh, Pol Pot offered the following remarkable summation of that event:

"We have won total, definitive, and *clean* victory, meaning that we have won it without any foreign connection or involvement. We dared to wage a struggle on a stand completely different from that of the world revolution. The world revolution carries out the struggle with all kinds of massive support — material, economic and financial — from the world's people. As for us, we have waged our revolutionary struggle basically on the principles of independence, sovereignty and self-reliance. . . . In the whole world, since the advent of the revolutionary war and since the birth of U.S. imperialism, no country, no people, and no army has been able to drive the imperialists out to the last man and score total victory over them [the way we have]. Nobody could." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p.233; emphasis in original.)

The most striking feature of this comment and virtually all other summations in the Pol Pot forces' version of their revolutionary triumph is the total absence of any reference to the central event which set the conditions for the success of the Khmer Rouge uprising — the U.S. defeat in Vietnam and the forward motion of the Vietnamese revolution.

This omission was not due to some rhetorical excess of the moment. Acknowledgement that the Kampuchean revolution could in any way have been assisted by Vietnam or that the struggle for Kampuchea's liberation was bound up in some organic fashion with the international class struggle was ideo-

logical anathema to the Pol Pot wing of the Kampuchean communist movement.

Even on a narrowly factual level, Pol Pot's comment is sheer nonsense. Wilfred Burchett points out that it was Vietnamese troops who "presented the FUNK\* forces with a huge liberated area cleared of all Lon Nol military or administrative forces by stopping the U.S.-Saigon invasion of May, 1970 and by smashing Lon Nol's Chenla 1 and Chenla 2 offensives. . . . In fact, without the substantial assistance of their Vietnamese comrades-in-arms, the Khmer Rouge would have been fighting on in the jungles of Cambodia long after the Vietnamese had liberated Saigon." (Burchett, 1981, pp.143-44.)

Burchett goes on to relate how in 1975 the Vietnamese supplied the Khmer Rouge with "130 mm and 122 mm artillery pieces together with the gun crews to handle them," (*ibid.*, p.144.) a contribution which played a critical role in the final battle for Phnom Penh.

Beyond such easily verified factual points, however, is the broader and more decisive historical question. Could the Khmer Rouge have come to power in Kampuchea in 1975 if the Vietnamese had not previously defeated the concentrated armed might of the U.S. and forced it to withdraw the bulk of its armed forces from Indochina? No serious observer of the revolutionary process in Indochina could hold this position. Even the imperialist strategists themselves have been clear on the pivotal role of the Vietnamese factor in the total Indochinese arena.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese revolution was itself inestimably advanced by the struggles in Kampuchea and Laos. In sharp contrast to Pol Pot's vainglorious declaration of the "purity" (what a strange term for a supposed communist to use in this context) of the Khmer Rouge victory, the Vietnamese communists have consistently recognized the importance of struggle in the other Indochinese countries and of international support for their victory. Thus Truong Chinh, president of

\*After Lon Nol came to power, the resistance struggle was led by the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK), formed by Sihanouk but in which Khmer Rouge troops played a leading role.

Vietnam's Council of State, noted in 1984:

"We were able to fight and win because our army and people fought in close coordination with the Lao and Kampuchean armies and peoples on the whole of the Indochinese battlefield. Besides, we constantly increased our international solidarity and won the great support and assistance of the fraternal socialist countries and the whole of progressive mankind." (Truong Chinh, 1984, p.5.)

Truong Chinh's point is not simply an agitational flourish or a perfunctory salutation to allies. Marxist-Leninists in Indochina have consistently considered the revolutionary alliance between Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea a centerpiece of their theory and strategy — "a law of development of the revolution in the three countries, the decisive factor in defeating all opponents and regaining independence and freedom." (Declaration of the Summit Meeting of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the People's Republic of Kampuchea and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, February 22-23, 1983, in Vientiane.)

However, the general line adopted by the KCP under Pol Pot constituted a conspicuous reversal of this fundamental assumption. The line of the Pol Pot group was that the Kampuchean revolution could only develop in complete independence from every other revolutionary struggle; indeed, that ties to socialist countries or other revolutionary movements — *especially the revolution in Vietnam* — would inevitably compromise and subvert the Khmer revolutionary process.

Consequently, the Pol Pot group's rise to ascendancy in the Kampuchean communist movement beginning in the early 1960s introduced into that movement a profound and ultimately disastrous nationalist deviation from Marxism-Leninism. The principal ideological and political expression of this deviation was a policy of deep-seated antagonism and open hostility to the Vietnamese revolution. This antagonism was given open voice years later when Khmer Rouge ideologists candidly declared that the Communist Party of Kampuchea\*

\*The name appears to have been adopted in 1966, replacing the title, Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP). The KPRP was actually founded in 1951, although Khmer Rouge histories cite 1960 as the date of the KCP "founding." After the ouster of Pol Pot, the KPRP was re-established as Kampuchea's Marxist-Leninist party.



had been founded "in order to fight the Vietnamese." (Chandler, 1983-A, p.42.)

Although hostility toward Vietnam was hardly a new feature of Kampuchean politics, such a view had never before been a dominant characteristic of the Kampuchean left. The French colonialists had carefully cultivated and reinforced the legacy of antagonism between the two countries and peoples stemming from their intertwined histories dating back to the days of the Angkor Empire and its subsequent dismemberment. The French imperial purpose, of course, was to prevent the development of a unified anti-colonial movement in the two countries. The two post-colonial regimes, those of Prince Norodom Sihanouk (1954-70) and the U.S. puppet Lon Nol (1970-75), were, despite important differences between them, similarly oriented on this issue.\* The bitter irony of history of course was that the "revolutionary" Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot went further than any of its predecessors both in promoting hostility to Vietnam and pursuing policies ultimately aimed at dismembering it and taking major portions of Vietnamese territory.

The element in Pol Pot's attack on Vietnam with which we will concern ourselves here, however, was that it was advanced in the name of Marxism, declaring itself even more revolutionary, more communist than not only the Vietnamese revolution but every other revolution that had preceded it.

The underlying framework of Pol Pot's nationalist deviation was the view that the conquest of Kampuchea and ultimately all of Southeast Asia was an inherent feature of Vietnamese policy *irrespective of the class nature of the Vietnamese state*. This thesis is developed in the Khmer Rouge's most remarkable document, the *Black Paper*.\*\* Subtitled "Facts and

\*Sihanouk's relatively brief period of cooperation with the Vietnamese revolution in the late 1960s was undoubtedly based on his assessment that the U.S. was going to lose the war and that his government was going to have to come to some terms with a victorious and revolutionary Vietnam.

\*\*All citations from the *Black Paper* are taken from the official English language edition as prepared by the Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, published in September, 1978.

Evidences of the Acts of Aggression and Annexation of Vietnam Against Kampuchea," the *Black Paper* traces Kampuchean history from the fifteenth century until the present in order to prove the thesis that the conquest of Kampuchea has been a permanent feature of Vietnamese politics for more than 500 years and continues to be so today. Thus the *Black Paper* lumps together the feudal reactionaries of Vietnamese history with Vietnamese revolutionaries whose contributions to the cause of anti-imperialist struggle for all of Indochina are inestimable:

"The acts of aggression and annexation of territory perpetrated by the Vietnamese, in the past as well as at the present, have clearly shown the true nature of the Vietnamese and Vietnam. . . . Whether in the feudalist era, in the French colonialists' period, in the U.S. imperialists' period or in the Ho Chi Minh period, the Vietnamese have not changed their true nature of aggressor, annexationist and swallower of other countries' territories." (*Black Paper*, p.5.)

Operating out of this ahistorical framework, Pol Pot undertook to rewrite the history of the Indochinese revolutionary movement, portraying every development after 1930 as a scheme by the Vietnamese for expansion and domination of their neighbors. In this context, it followed that all Kampucheans who during those years had cooperated with the Vietnamese were categorized as either dupes or conscious traitors.

Two points in particular became part of the ideological arsenal invoked by Pol Pot and his supporters as "proof" that the development of the communist movement in Indochina was, in the first place, a Vietnamese scheme to win hegemony: the fact that the first organized expression of Marxism-Leninism in the region took the form of an Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) and, second, that this party's political program envisioned the prospect of an Indochina Federation after the success of the revolution. The strained interpretation placed on these historical events by the Khmer Rouge is itself a telling commentary on the nationalist deviation brought into the Kampuchean communist movement by the Pol Pot faction.

### The Indochinese Communist Party

According to Pol Pot, the founding of the Indochinese Com-

munist Party by Ho Chi Minh in 1930 was itself a reflection of Vietnam's hegemonic aspirations. This event is described in the *Black Paper* in the following manner:

"The Vietnamese Party was founded in 1930 by the name of 'Indochinese Communist Party.' The name 'Indochinese Communist Party' clearly and sufficiently means that it is a Party for the three countries of 'Indochina'. . . . Thus, the name given to the Vietnamese Party means that this party is at one and the same time for Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea. The choice of such a name reveals that the objective of this party is to dominate the three countries." (*Black Paper*, p.19.)

While the *Black Paper* conveniently omits certain well-known facts about the founding of the ICP — particularly that the name and the concept behind it was adopted at the urging of the Comintern and that a number of Vietnamese communists, including Ho Chi Minh, were at first opposed to the Comintern's directive\* — there is a more fundamental point of history at stake in this particular debate, namely the relative strategic significance of the Vietnamese revolution to the revolutions in the other two Indochinese countries.

All egalitarian prejudice to the contrary, ultimately what must be recognized is that the anchor of the revolutionary process in Indochina has been and continues to be the Vietnamese revolution. In a broad, historical sense, the Vietnamese revolution has not only set the conditions for the revolution in the other countries of Indochina; the success of the revolutionary process in Laos and Kampuchea has historically been dependent on the forward motion of the Vietnamese revolution.

Historical materialists will not have difficulty in grasping this concrete expression of the law of uneven development. Despite the glory and achievements of ancient Angkor, Vietnam was the jewel of France's twentieth-century Indochina colonial empire. Its large population base (approximately six times the combined population of Laos and Kampuchea), readily accessible natural resources and natural harbors made it the focal point for French capital's exploitation of the whole region.

While the working class in all three Indochinese countries

\*See Gareth Porter's "Vietnamese Policy Toward Kampuchea, 1930-1970," in Chandler and Kiernan, 1983, p. 58.

was relatively small, it was most developed in Vietnam where labor-intensive rubber plantations, a burgeoning coal mining industry, and a number of major urban centers and seaports had brought about the beginnings of a modern proletariat. As a result, even in Kampuchea, the workers on the rubber plantations and many of the low-level civil servants were Vietnamese, who were brought into the country by the French.

Not surprisingly, resistance to the French was also at a more advanced stage of struggle in Vietnam than in either Laos or Kampuchea, again a reflection of the objective level of development of the Vietnamese economy and the relative intensity of the class antagonisms.\*

It is not simply a historical accident, therefore, (much less a conscious plot) that Marxism-Leninism came to the Indochinese revolution by way of Vietnam. The emergence in the 1920s of a generation of Vietnamese revolutionaries, typified by Ho Chi Minh, and the existence of a class of Vietnamese who could provide the social base for revolutionary politics reflected — in addition to a worldwide ripening of the anti-colonial movement generally — the intensification of the contradictions within Vietnamese society in which its relatively advanced level of capitalist development was an important and decisive factor.

While these broad historical conditions help explain why

\*Two interesting studies of the class structure of Khmer society, both of which demonstrate the extremely low level of development of the Kampuchean economy, are to be found in the excellent compilation, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*, edited by Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua. "The Peasantry of Kampuchea: Colonialism and Modernization" is taken from the doctoral thesis of Hou Yuon. "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea" is extracted from the doctoral thesis of Hu Nim. In later years, both Hou Yuon and Hu Nim became prominent figures in the Khmer Rouge and subsequently held ministerial positions in the Pol Pot regime, Hou as Minister of the Interior, Cooperatives and Communal Reforms, Hu as Minister of Information. Hou was one of the first casualties of the Pol Pot purges, disappearing within a few months of his first identification as Interior Minister, because, as Hu Nim was later to declare, "he opposed our policy of abolishing money and wages and of evacuating the cities." (Barnett, 1983, p.220.) Hu Nim himself was later executed in 1977, charged with being a "Vietnamese agent."

Marxism-Leninism and a communist movement developed in Vietnam earlier than in Laos and Kampuchea, the 1930 decision to found an *Indochinese* (rather than just a Vietnamese) Communist Party reflects both the internationalist orientation of the communists and their strategic conception of the revolutionary struggle. With France the dominant colonial power in all three Indochinese countries, a unified revolutionary strategy which, at that time, could only have been undertaken by a single *Indochinese* party, was a historical necessity. As the French sociologist, Serge Thion, has noted: "The decision to create a single party for Indochina seems to have been determined by ordinary common sense." (Thion, 1980, p.43.)

Of course, the founding of an Indochinese communist party could not, by itself, suddenly position the communists as the leading force in the revolutionary movements of their respective countries. More favorable conditions for such a development did exist in Vietnam, and during the next decade Vietnamese communists did indeed become the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle. In both Laos and Kampuchea, on the other hand, the establishment of the ICP was *the first step* in a process which would require almost two decades before it began to mature to a point resembling the situation in Vietnam in the early '30s. In Kampuchea, again not surprisingly, the initial political penetration took place principally among resident Vietnamese workers and in the large Vietnamese minority community.

Nevertheless, the founding of the ICP represented the beginning of the qualitative transformation in both Laos and Kampuchea of what had been up until then a purely spontaneous nationalist sentiment among the masses — a sentiment framed by the assumptions of bourgeois nationalism and with only the most rudimentary organizational forms to give it a political expression — to a process guided by an advanced anti-imperialist consciousness.

In sharp contrast to Pol Pot's view of the founding of the ICP as a Vietnamese plot against Kampuchea and Laos, Marxist-Leninists in all three Indochinese countries have historically underscored the significance of their common origin and its links to the international communist movement.

Thus, in his account of the development of the Laotian revo-

lution, Kaysone Phomvihane, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), notes:

"The truth that emerged from the October Revolution, that 'to save the motherland and liberate the nation there is no other path but proletarian revolution,' was brought to Indochina by Ho Chi Minh, that distinguished fighter of the world communist movement. In doing this, he united genuine patriotism with Marxism-Leninism, and linked the revolutionary movement in Indochina with the world revolutionary process. In 1930, the Communist Party of Indochina was founded by Comrade Ho Chi Minh, and marked a turning point in the history of the revolutionary movement of the three countries of Indochina. From that time onwards, the revolutionary struggle of the Lao people, led by the Marxist-Leninist party, entered a qualitatively new stage under the banner of national democracy." (Phomvihane, 1980, pp. 13-14.)

This, too, was the general assessment traditionally held by the communists in Kampuchea — *with the stark exception of the Pol Pot faction*. Typical was the comment in a party history text that "Proletarian class Marxism-Leninism was injected into our revolutionary movement by the international communist movement and the Vietnamese Communists." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 233.)

After the founding of the ICP, the communists of Indochina continued to function within a single party for the next 20 years, reflecting both the unitary character of the struggle against French colonialism and the still relatively primitive level of development of the communist forces in Kampuchea and Laos, in particular the lack of a critical cadre mass for the formation of separate parties.

After World War II the revolutionary struggle in Indochina entered a new stage, triggered principally by a qualitative maturation of the Vietnamese revolution. Vietnamese revolutionaries had played a leading role in the struggle against Japan, building up their numbers and their military capacity and gaining wide influence among the masses. On the basis of these gains, the Vietnamese communists were able to lead a successful uprising in August, 1945 leading to Vietnam's successful declaration of independence from French rule.

Vietnam's "August Revolution" marked a new stage in the

anti-colonial revolution in East Asia, one in which a large-scale armed struggle for national independence became the defining feature of revolutionary politics. Known as the "First Indochina War," this struggle would go on for nine years, culminating in the ignominious defeat of the French at the battle of Dienbienphu in 1954.

Needless to say, the effect of this new stage in the Vietnamese revolution was felt in Kampuchea and Laos as well. By April, 1950, Khmer revolutionaries had established a national anti-colonial united front (the Issarak Front) and a Resistance Government headed by Kampuchea's foremost communist leader, Son Ngoc Minh. Through these forms, revolutionary forces were able to establish bases in all of Kampuchea's provinces. In Laos, revolutionary forces momentarily were able to seize power in October, 1945 but were subsequently ousted by the French. After a period of regroupment, a Lao People's Liberation Army was re-established in 1949 and, in 1950, a Lao Liberation Front.

These developments in Kampuchea and Laos in turn represented a major qualitative advance over the pre-World War II period in both the conditions framing the anti-colonial revolution throughout Indochina and the maturity of the revolutionary forces themselves.

As a result, in 1951 the Indochinese Communist Party voluntarily dissolved itself to be replaced by three separate revolutionary parties: the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP), the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). At the same time, the United Resistance Front of Laos, Vietnam and Kampuchea was also established in order to fortify and coordinate the common struggle of the three Indochinese peoples against French colonialism.

Clearly the conditions and level of struggle throughout Indochina had altered considerably by the early 1950s. One Marxist-Leninist party for all three countries was no longer appropriate nor adequate for the new tasks at hand. However, the decision to dismantle the ICP was accompanied by a summation that its original formation had proven correct and invaluable in laying a firm ideological and political foundation for advancing the struggle for national liberation and

socialism throughout Indochina. It was only with the rise of the Pol Pot faction in the Kampuchean movement that this summation was ever challenged by any section of the communist movement in Indochina.

### The Indochina Federation

The other key building block designed to buttress Pol Pot's claim that the Vietnamese communists were bent on a course of domination and expansion in Indochina is the fact that the ICP, shortly after its founding, projected as a long-range political goal the establishment — after independence from France had been won — of an Indochina Federation made up of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea.

According to the Pol Pot group, the very idea of an Indochina Federation was nothing but a Vietnamese device by which Laos and Kampuchea would, in fact, come under the domination of and be annexed by Vietnam. Here is how the *Black Paper* describes the Indochina Federation:

"The slogan of this party (the ICP) is to wage a struggle for an independent Indochina in order to found an 'Indochina Federation.' Consequently the strategic program of the Vietnamese Party is the 'Indochina Federation.' . . . an entity under the leadership of only one party, the 'Indochinese Communist Party,' which means only one country, one people and one army. Since 1930, in order to achieve this strategic political program, the Vietnamese have prepared their forces and trained their cadres to successively send them to work in Laos and Kampuchea." (*Black Paper*, pp. 19-20.)

Although the concept of an Indochina Federation was drastically modified in 1941 and shortly after dropped completely from all future party programs, it became one of the central theses of the Pol Pot group that Vietnam has never given up the idea of creating a single political entity, *which it would inevitably dominate*, out of the three Indochinese countries.

Once the liberation of South Vietnam had been completed, according to Pol Pot, the Vietnamese actively renewed their attempt to establish an Indochina Federation. Kampuchea's resistance to Vietnamese attempts to implement this scheme, again according to the Pol Pot forces, was the main source of the conflict between 1975 and 1978. Vietnam's real objective in

sending its troops into Kampuchea in 1978-79, therefore, was to realize this long-deferred expansionist dream.\*

No "proof" of Vietnamese expansionist and hegemonic aims has been cited more often than the ICP's formal call for an Indochinese Federation. However, this argument, too, can not be settled solely on the basis of the "facts," since its ideological underpinning is a profound distortion of history and a telling reflection of the narrow, petty bourgeois nationalism that characterizes Maoism in general and especially its Kampuchean expression.

Therefore, the first thing that must be said is that there is absolutely nothing wrong *in principle* with the idea of a single federation of all three Indochinese countries. Certainly it is not hard to imagine how in the 1930s that particular state form would have been viewed as most conducive to consolidating political power, accelerating the development of the forces of production, and effecting the transition to socialism after the triumph of the anti-colonial revolution in each country — especially since the ICP based itself in part on the prescient assumption that the victory in the three countries would unfold as part of a single revolutionary process.

Like the concept of the Indochinese Communist Party, the Indochinese Federation was also principally a reflection of the outlook of the Comintern during that period, an outlook which envisioned the development of multi-national socialist states as an integral part of defending revolutionary power and building socialism. Again it should be no mystery how the Comintern arrived at this particular notion — since it was consistent with the fundamental historical materialism of Marxism and more importantly was an understandable generalization from the experience of the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent

\* This same theme has been sounded by most of those on the U.S. left who bitterly attacked Vietnam in 1979 and who, directly or indirectly, continue to support Pol Pot and his efforts to topple the present revolutionary government in Phnom Penh. Typical was the comment of the Communist Party (M-L) — then the foremost U.S. Maoist formation but since mercifully collapsed — which charged that "the Vietnamese leadership (had) demonstrated concretely that their historic aim of building an 'Indochina Federation' with Vietnam in charge was still their objective." (*The Call*, Feb. 19, 1979.)

emergence and consolidation of the multi-national USSR.

In addition, the ICP's conception of an Indochinese Federation was itself based on established Marxist-Leninist principles on the correct handling of the national question, as revealed in the party's 1935 resolution on the question:

"After driving the French imperialists out of Indochina, each nation will have the right to self-determination; it may join an Indochinese Federation or set up a separate state; it is free to join or leave the Federation; it may follow whatever political system it likes. Its fraternal alliance with the other nations must be based on the principles of revolutionary sincerity, freedom and equality." (*The Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict*, 1979, p. 5.)

Desirable and understandable though an Indochina Federation of socialist countries may have been in theory, however, concrete historical conditions also had to be taken into account. On one hand, the struggle against a common oppressor frequently creates conditions in which close cooperation and even an integrated political structure between revolutionaries in neighboring countries is not only desirable but absolutely essential. On the other hand, the very nature of the *national democratic revolution* — which is, in essence, the character of the anti-colonial struggle — of necessity emphasizes the national identity and particularity of each people. Such struggles also draw in not only the class-conscious workers who have the best basis for an internationalist outlook, but other classes as well — the petty bourgeoisie, peasantry, small shopkeepers as well as the patriotic bourgeoisie — whose spontaneous orientation tends to be principally nationalist.

The delicate relationship between these two somewhat contradictory pulls cannot be resolved simply on the basis of the communists' own long-range vision of a world in which the community of labor has surpassed the distinctions of national boundaries. History and culture must be taken into account — all the more in countries where the mass of the population who provide the social base for the revolution are not proletarians. The stand that the communists take on the concrete national questions, therefore, must be determined by the actual conditions and cannot be determined by formula.

This, indeed, was the approach taken by the ICP. While the anti-colonial struggle against France amply verified the party's

thesis on the historical necessity for closely coordinating the revolutionary efforts of all three countries, the *forms* through which that unity would be expressed — a single party and a post-revolutionary federation — were both drastically altered over time. In 1940, the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the ICP advanced a new formulation declaring that the communists were resolved "to settle the national question within the framework of each of the three countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and . . . to create favorable conditions for the Cambodian and Lao peoples to develop the spirit of independence and in order to fortify and coordinate the common struggle against French colonialism." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 18.)

By the time the ICP was dissolved in 1951 and revolutionary parties were established in each of the three Indochinese countries, the question of a possible Indochina Federation had totally receded and remained a historical relic until it was revived, ironically, not by the Vietnamese but by Pol Pot as part of the Khmer Rouge's ideological assault on Vietnam.

However, according to the Pol Pot version of history, Vietnamese designs on Kampuchea did not come to an end with either the dissolution of the ICP or the abandonment of the proposal for a single Indochina Federation. Quite the contrary, these "formal" adjustments merely disguised further Vietnamese aggression which supposedly surfaced next at the Geneva Conference.

### The 1954 Geneva Conference

A frequently cited example of Vietnam's hegemonic stand toward the Kampuchean revolution has been the 1954 Geneva Peace Conference. Held in the shadow of the shattering French defeat at the Battle of Dienbienphu, the conference established the legal basis for a temporary division of Vietnam into North and South while also agreeing to certain dispositions regarding Laos and Kampuchea. A standard pro-Pol Pot view holds that Vietnam sold out the Kampuchean revolution at Geneva and that this action was the reflection of a Vietnamese policy which consistently "sacrificed" Kampuchea to its own national interest. For example, the pro-Pol Pot academic, Stephen Heder,

states, "What had been achieved with Vietnamese aid and advice up to 1954 had been lost. The losses could credibly be blamed upon what the Vietnamese had done at and since Geneva." (Heder, 1978, p. 15.)

Specifically, the Vietnamese are accused of having agreed to the demands of the French and British to separate the question of Kampuchea from the negotiations over Vietnam, and then agreeing to an unfavorable resolution of the Kampuchean question. Under the terms of the eventual settlement, Khmer revolutionaries were not permitted to retain any of the territories that had been liberated in the course of the anti-French struggle.

The bitter irony in view of subsequent history is that this negative concession was not made by Vietnam — although the Vietnamese were pressured into acquiescing in it — but by the Chinese representative to the Geneva Conference, Zhou Enlai. The Vietnamese position in Geneva is a matter of historical record. On the very first day of the conference, Pham Van Dong, the Vietnamese delegate, proposed a resolution calling for the revolutionary forces in both Laos and Kampuchea to be invited on an equal footing with other participants. (*Chinese Rulers' Crimes Against Kampuchea*, p. 25.)

As the conference went on, the French press recorded the Vietnamese position. "Pham Van Dong refused all separation of the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian cases," reported *Le Monde* (May 20, 1954). *France Soir* of the same date noted that Pham Van Dong "did not give way an inch on the question whether the problems of the Pathet Lao and the Khmers could be discussed separately from that of Vietnam."

The Vietnamese called for:

"a temporary military demarcation line in Vietnam at the 13th parallel [which would have given the Kampuchians a liberated rear base area bordering on Kampuchea - I.S.] and the holding of free elections within six months for national reunification. . . . Solution to the Lao and Kampuchean questions should include the creation of two regrouping zones for the resistance forces, one in the north near the Chinese and Vietnamese borders and the other in Central and Southern Laos; and in Kampuchea, of two regrouping zones for the resistance forces: one situated east and northeast of the Mekong river, and the other, southwest of this river, and there would be free general elec-



tions within six months in Laos and Kampuchea." (*The Truth About Vietnam-China Relations Over the Last 30 Years*, 1979, pp. 23-24.)

The Chinese position, which was extremely influential because supplies to the revolutionary forces in all three countries had to come through China, was to offer the French far more in the way of concessions than the Vietnamese were willing to make. As one example of Beijing's pressure, the Vietnamese report that they were warned by the Chinese prior to the opening of the conference that "China cannot openly assist Vietnam in case of the expansion of the conflict there." (*ibid.*, p. 21.)

The main points of the agreement finally arrived at were:

*Line of demarcation between North and South at the 17th parallel.* Step by step, the Vietnamese had been forced to surrender their original demand for a demarcation point at the 13th parallel to the 14th, 15th and 16th. In the process, they were forced to abandon the maintenance of a rear base area for the Khmer revolutionaries and, not able to obtain agreement on the 16th parallel, control over the main highways leading from Vietnam to Laos.

*National elections in two years.* The Vietnamese had pressed for quick elections, proposing they be held in six months. The French held out for the longest possible time period. Even more significantly, no provisions were made to guarantee the holding of elections. Thus was born the artificial entity, "South Vietnam," whose "defense" became the U.S. political objective in the Vietnam war.

*Regroupment zones in Kampuchea and Laos.* Assessments subsequently made by a wide array of political observers are that it was around this question in particular that China's own objectives at the conference — to secure a buffer zone for itself to guard against a U.S. military presence on its border — came to the fore. In regard to Laos, Zhou Enlai insisted on a regroupment zone for the Pathet Lao revolutionaries, described this way by Burchett: "The Laotian revolutionary forces had to withdraw from their strong positions in ten of the Laotian provinces and regroup in the two northern-most provinces. . . . It meant that the Pathet Lao would have to abandon its most important base areas and the people who had loyally sup-

ported its armed struggle for many years." (Burchett, 1981, p. 29.)

In regard to Kampuchea, the Vietnamese were forced to drop the demand for a regroupment area altogether. According to Burchett, "The DRV delegation fought very hard for a regroupment area for the Khmer Issarak but got no support from Zhou Enlai on this question for the very simple reason that China had no common frontier with Cambodia." (*ibid.*, p. 29.)

In his monumental study of the origins and history of the Vietnam war, Stanley Karnow sums up the results of the Geneva Conference in the following terms, "Mendes-France . . . had won more for France at the conference table than its generals had won on the battlefield; the Vietminh had gained less in the talks than in combat. Pham Van Dong,\* furious with Zhou, walked away from the last round of haggling and muttered to an aide, 'He has double-crossed us.'" (Karnow, p. 204.)

On balance, the Geneva agreements were undoubtedly a positive development for the revolution in Indochina, an important respite and consolidation period for future advances. As the Vietnamese summed them up later, the agreements "marked a great victory of the revolutionary forces in Indochina and greatly contributed to bringing about the disintegration of the French colonial empire and announced the irreversible process of collapse of colonialism and world imperialism." (*The Truth About Vietnam-China Relations*, p. 26.)

But the conference was not an unalloyed success and the Vietnamese summation recognized that as well, declaring: "The Geneva solution also prevented the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea from winning complete victory in their war of resistance against French colonialism which was clearly a practical possibility, considering the balance of forces on the battlefield." (*ibid.*, p. 26.)

While the Geneva agreements registered a long-term strategic gain for the Indochinese revolution, there is little doubt that they had a negative short-term impact on the revolutionary struggle in Kampuchea. Cut off from the liberated section of

\*Then Vietnam's chief negotiator in Paris; now Premier of Vietnam.



Vietnam when the "temporary" demarcation line in that country was set at the 17th parallel and denied a "regroupment area" in the country, the Kampuchean liberation forces were unable to continue the armed struggle. Their lives endangered if they remained in the country, many fled to Hanoi.

In hindsight, perhaps the most negative consequence stemming from this unfortunate resolution of the Kampuchean question in 1954 was the subsequent weakening of the Kampuchean communist movement which helped pave the way for the Pol Pot group to win leadership over the movement. With the more experienced and tested leaders of the Kampuchean struggle driven out of the country and unable to return, the remaining lower level cadre who remained behind were overmatched by the young "militants" who came back to Kampuchea from Paris in the middle and late 1950s filled with the latest theories of the French New Left and strongly influenced by Maoism.

### The Anti-Sihanouk Struggle

The first significant *political* clash between Pol Pot's faction of the KCP and the Vietnamese communists came in the mid-1960s and revolved around the KCP's decision to launch armed struggle against the ruling Sihanouk regime. The Vietnamese opposed this decision, which they viewed as "ultra-left." This was subsequently cited by Pol Pot as the basis for asserting that his faction was the only genuinely nationalist grouping within the KCP (his opponents being labeled mere "puppets" of the Vietnamese) and that the logic of the Kampuchean and Vietnamese revolutions were inherently irreconcilable. The *Black Paper* states:

"The forces organized by the KCP were genuinely national, in the Party as well as in the army and the people, for the experience had shown that they had not to\* think of relying on the Vietnamese. As early as 1966, the KCP has judged that it could have only state relations and other official relations with Vietnam, for there was a fundamental contradiction between Kampuchea's revolution and the Vietnamese revolution. The

\*Meaning "could not."

Vietnamese wanted to put Kampuchea's revolution under their thumb." (*Black Paper*, p. 35.)

The "fundamental contradiction" as Pol Pot saw it was this: Sihanouk had increasingly moved to positions that were politically and militarily useful to the Vietnamese in the war with the U.S., a war which in 1966 and 1967 was at a critical turning point. But at the same time, at least according to Pol Pot, the Kampuchean masses were more than ready for armed struggle aimed at overthrowing Sihanouk. To Pol Pot, this seeming contradiction was being utilized by the Vietnamese to frustrate the forward motion of the Kampuchean struggle: "If Kampuchea's revolution developed and strengthened in full independence, the Vietnamese would not be able to control it." (*Black Paper*, p. 32.)

Khmer Rouge supporters have continued to sum up this controversy from a similar framework, Heder putting it this way:

"Mid-1967 was, from the Vietnamese point of view, an extremely inappropriate time for the KCP to decide to make all-out war against the Sihanouk regime. Yet from the Kampuchean point of view, there was no choice but to make that war. Thus, Sihanouk's anti-Americanism became most precious to the Vietnamese at almost the same time that domestic political and economic developments in Kampuchea made the need to fight and, in the KCP's analysis, the possibilities of fighting against Sihanouk's very real anticommunism most obvious to the Kampucheans. The contradiction between the VWP's needs in terms of liberating the South and the KCP's needs in terms of revolutionizing Kampuchea had become most acute. The VWP probably believed that the KCP could resolve this contradiction by some variation on united front tactics. The KCP probably believed that such tactics just could not work. . . . Each Party saw the other as thinking only in terms of its own interests." (Heder, 1979, p.12; emphasis in original.)

But was this a clash of objectively antagonistic interests — or was it a clash of conflicting ideologies and political frameworks?

Pol Pot, to be sure, frames the controversy simply as one between Vietnamese and Kampucheans. In fact, the line struggle also took place within the KCP. Pol Pot, as usual, charged his Khmer opponents — among them those with the longest his-

tory of work in the Kampuchean movement — with being nothing but Vietnamese “agents.” Ironically, Pol Pot’s principal encouragement came from a completely non-Khmer, non-Indochinese source — the ultra-left wing of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, characterized by the famous slogan, “revolution is always right.”

Even Heder, who clearly accepts the Pol Pot assessment on launching the armed struggle, acknowledges, in a most telling description, Chinese influence on the KCP perspective:

“For Chinese foreign policy, the summer of 1967 was a unique period. This was the height of the Cultural Revolution and both the Foreign Ministry and the International Liaison Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party, which handled relations with foreign Communist Parties, were, beginning in May, under heavy pressure from and, by August, in the hands of the most radical cultural revolutionary forces. . . . They advocated a much more radical foreign policy than China had pursued in the past or would pursue in the future. The representative of the radical group in control of the Foreign Ministry in August was a Chinese diplomat whose experiences in Indonesia during the destruction of the Communist Party there had convinced him that communist cooperation with anti-imperialist Southeast Asian regimes was futile, and that armed struggle was the only solution. . . . At the same time, Chinese relations with the Vietnamese communists also hit a low point. Red Guards probably interrupted shipments of arms to Vietnam and the Chinese media virtually ceased to refer to the struggle to liberate the South. This gave credence to the idea that the Vietnamese communists were not to be considered a good model for other revolutionaries, that they might even be revisionists, whose foreign and domestic policies were reactionary, and therefore that the KCP had every reason to be in conflict with the VWP. Thus, at the time that the KCP took its decision to launch full-scale armed struggle against Sihanouk, it was perhaps discreetly supported and encouraged by the persons then running China’s foreign policy.” (*ibid.*, pp. 10-11.)

The “application” of this Red Guard mentality to Kampuchea is not at all hard to imagine — not so much as a set of “instructions” to the Khmer Rouge but as a fundamental ideological compatibility between Pol Pot and the extremism of Mao’s Cultural Revolution at what was probably its most bizarre

point of development.\*

But in light of the super-revolutionary zealotry characteristic of the Cultural Revolution *and those influenced by it*, what are we to make of Pol Pot’s assessment that the time for armed struggle was ripe in Kampuchea and of Heder’s echoing conclusion that “there was no choice but to make that war?” Indeed, the Vietnamese assessment would appear to have been much more accurate:

“The Sihanouk government enjoyed considerable support from the people, since it stubbornly defended the country’s independence and neutrality, especially against the designs of U.S. imperialism. To support Sihanouk would mean to support a government that was feudal and reactionary in certain respects, but to fight it militarily would weaken it in the face of U.S. designs.”\*\* (*Vietnam-Kampuchean Conflict*, 1979, p. 12.)

At the very least, the conditions for creating a broad, popular anti-Sihanouk front were far from ripe in Kampuchea. Aided by a flood of Western capital and even assistance from the Soviet Union trying to shore up his neutralism, Sihanouk had earlier launched a wave of industrial development and public works. This program of “modernization” had considerable appeal for Kampuchea’s professionals, intellectuals and small entrepreneurs who saw in the tendency toward urbanization and commerce a more hopeful future for their own ambi-

\*A few months later, in the fall of 1967, Zhou Enlai convinced Mao that whatever other “merits” the Chairman might see in the Cultural Revolution, it was making a mess of China’s foreign policy. Shortly thereafter, the radicals were removed and a new line on Kampuchea which emphasized the “political struggle” against Sihanouk — as opposed to the armed struggle — was emphasized. Interestingly enough, the VWP had advocated a similar approach which would be based on political but not armed opposition to the Sihanouk regime. It seems, then, that the Vietnamese were not the only ones who concluded that Pol Pot’s line was “ultra-left.”

\*\*A glimpse into the heated line struggle that clearly took place at the time is offered by the *Black Paper*, which charges that the Vietnamese communists “attacked and ran down the KCP by saying that its policy was wrong, leftist, adventurous, etc. To the Kampuchea nationals who studied in North Vietnam, they handed out *Leftwing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, by Lenin.” (*Black Paper*, p. 26.)

tions. At the same time, the infusion of foreign aid eased somewhat the tax burden on a section of the peasantry. These developments, combined with a reinvigorated national pride engendered by Sihanouk's defiance in the face of U.S. pressure, help explain why he was able to win a marked degree of ideological legitimacy among the masses. (Even today, some Kampucheans look back on the "Sihanouk years" nostalgically as a time when significant national progress was being achieved.)

The Vietnamese prediction that the principal result of the Khmer Rouge decision to launch the armed struggle would be to strengthen the forces of the right and embolden U.S. imperialist plotting was quickly borne out. Seizing on the difficulties thus imposed on the Sihanouk regime, the U.S. backed an armed coup by Lon Nol in March, 1970. The success of that enterprise provided the U.S. with a reliable puppet in Phnom Penh and paved the way for the direct invasion a month later. Ironically, the Khmer Rouge's growth in influence then came about on the basis of the anti-Lon Nol alliance they struck not only with Sihanouk but also with the Vietnamese.

In hindsight, the Pol Pot group says that this is what they had in mind all along, but the self-serving character of such *post facto* analysis is fairly transparent, especially since the *decisive factor* from 1970 on was not the military effort of the Khmer Rouge but the forced withdrawal of U.S. troops due to Vietnamese political and military advances.

There is, however, an even more fundamental question of revolutionary principle and strategy involved in this controversy than Pol Pot's ultra-left and adventurist assessment of the timing of the armed struggle: the objective relationship between the Kampuchean and Vietnamese revolutions; that is, to what extent was the Kampuchean revolution *in fact* — all subjective appraisals aside — dependent on the forward motion of the Vietnamese revolution and mutually accountable to that objective relationship?

The heart of Pol Pot's line is that there is no such strategic relationship; that the Kampuchean revolution proceeded strictly from its own internal logic; that the gains of the Kampuchean revolution were solely due to the efforts of Khmer revolutionaries, and that the revolution would have been irretrievably compromised had it advanced as the result of outside

support or in relationship to another revolutionary struggle. Indeed, the Khmer Rouge official mythology was that the Kampuchean revolution would have succumbed to Vietnamese "hegemonism" if Pol Pot had not hewed to a completely independent course.

Pol Pot's narrow nationalist tunnel vision blinded him to the most elementary political reality about the Kampuchean revolution, namely that its forward motion — including the victory of April, 1975 — has always been totally bound up with the world revolutionary process in general and the Vietnamese revolution in particular.

To hold that the revolution in Kampuchea proceeded independently from the historic shift in the world balance of forces ushered in by the October revolution and since qualitatively advanced by the consolidation of socialism in the Soviet Union and the growth of a socialist camp is both idealist and xenophobic. Likewise, any attempt to sever the connection between the Kampuchean revolution and the revolution in the other countries of Indochina, most particularly in Vietnam, is an indefensible departure from political reality, to say nothing of its abandonment of the internationalism that has become a profound material force in shaping the world struggle against imperialism.

Especially in the period 1966-67, a go-it-alone strategy for the Kampuchean revolution was a recipe for disaster. With half a million U.S. troops already committed to battle in Indochina, the prospects for the Kampuchean revolution — to seize power and to hold its own against the inevitable attacks that would be mounted against it — were completely bound up with the war then raging in Vietnam. In this light, Vietnamese concerns that the armed struggle against Sihanouk might jeopardize not only the Vietnamese struggle but the Kampuchean revolution as well, appear to have been well-founded.

Certainly the Vietnamese had no illusions about Sihanouk. His authority rested on the extremely backward relations of production which served to keep the Kampuchean masses locked into a semi-feudal condition in the countryside. And despite his claims to be promoting a kind of "Buddhist socialism," his program of "modernization" — considerably aided by France — was designed to forestall the development of a

national revolutionary movement similar to the one in neighboring Vietnam.

Nevertheless, in concrete tactical terms, Sihanouk in 1963 rejected an offer of U.S. aid, fearful of getting Kampuchea enmeshed in the growing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Again in 1965, after U.S. troops were introduced into Vietnam, Sihanouk broke relations with the U.S. At the same time Sihanouk permitted Vietnamese forces to operate on Kampuchean territory where they established staging and rear base areas, and where they built a significant portion of the Ho Chi Minh trail. Use of Kampuchean territory in this fashion was of particular importance in the summer of 1967 because this was the period of preparation for the Tet offensive launched early in the following year. And yet, this was precisely the moment when the Khmer Rouge was moving over to armed struggle against Sihanouk!

Even if Pol Pot's assessment of the stage of the Kampuchean revolution were accurate — and, as we have seen, there is little reason to believe that this assessment was anything but an application of the infantile left view that "revolution is always right" — would this have justified actions by the KCP which jeopardized the armed struggle in Vietnam at what was probably the critical turning point, not only for South Vietnam's national liberation but for Laos' and Kampuchea's as well? The answer to this question cannot be formulated in terms of the internal logic of Kampuchea's revolution alone. An internationalist perspective would have to take into account the revolutionary process as a whole. As Lenin points out:

"The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a *small part* of the general democratic (now: general-socialist) *world* movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p.341.)

Such a point of view was thoroughly alien to the narrow, petty bourgeois nationalist outlook which characterized the Pol Pot wing of the KCP. Not only did they elevate the question of the "independence" of the Kampuchean revolutionary process to the level of sacred principle; they viewed Vietnamese assertions of an internationalist vantage point as simply a mask for expansionist intentions.

Once again, the *Black Paper's* clearly self-serving account of a meeting between the two parties in 1965, at which Pol Pot apparently first informed the Vietnamese of the KCP decision to launch armed struggle, provides a rare behind-the-scenes look into the nature of the line struggle at the time.

"This made the Vietnamese worried; for if Kampuchea's revolution went on, that would affect their collaboration with the ruling classes in Phnom Penh. What is worse, if Kampuchea's revolution developed and strengthened in full independence, the Vietnamese would not be able to control it. . . . The Vietnamese carried out a stand-up attack against the revolutionary concept and position of the KCP, so that it would abandon the revolutionary struggle and wait until the Vietnamese achieve their victory which would automatically bring about the victory to Kampuchea.

"During the talks, the Vietnamese knew perfectly that the KCP firmly abided by the position of independence and sovereignty. That is why they concentrated their attacks against this position. Le Duan affirmed that in the world it is impossible to abide by the position of independence and sovereignty. One has to rely on the others. It is also true for Vietnam. As for the three countries, Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, they have to support each other." (*Black Paper*, pp. 32-33.)

But for Pol Pot, Le Duan's common sense internationalist perspective was just one more example of Vietnamese treachery. Of course, what got conveniently dropped out of the Pol Pot account was the fact that even after the successful pro-U.S. coup overthrew Sihanouk, the Vietnamese stood firmly behind the Khmer armed struggle and did not allow the U.S. to manipulate their criticisms of the Khmer Rouge's strategy (which were well known to the U.S. State Department) to drive a wedge between the two movements. Thus the common anti-imperialist front was preserved, principally by the efforts of the Vietnamese.

#### The War Years (1970-1975)

Lon Nol's coup and the entrenchment of the U.S. in Kampuchea led to a temporary subsiding of the differences between Pol Pot and the Vietnamese. Urged on by Beijing, Pol Pot and

Sihanouk effected a tactical alliance against the Lon Nol government; and, in the aftermath of the U.S. expansion of the war into Kampuchea and Laos, strategic coordination between the three Indochinese countries resumed. But Pol Pot's deep suspicion of and hostility to Vietnam *and to any in the KCP who upheld the internationalist view* remained just below the surface and continued to emerge time and again throughout the period. As the Khmer Rouge itself was later to say of this period, "There was often fighting between the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea and the Vietnamese. Our fighters could no longer bear with them." (*Black Paper*, p. 68.)

The extent to which Khmer Rouge policy was based principally on hostility to Vietnam was revealed some years later by Sihanouk who had, for a period to time, been treated as a confidante by KCP leaders: "During the year 1978 Khieu Samphan told me quite clearly that even throughout the anti-American war (1970-1975) the Communist Party and revolutionary army of Kampuchea never ceased to consider North Vietnam and its army as the enemy number one, American imperialism occupying only second place as far as enemies of Kampuchea were concerned." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 265.)

One grim reflection of that policy occurred shortly after Lon Nol came to power. On the basis of the new anti-U.S. alliance, many of the exiled Khmer communists who had been in Hanoi during the 1960s returned to Kampuchea in order to participate in the struggle. Their fate foreshadowed the genocidal bloodbath which was to come after 1975. As David Chandler reports:

"Nearly a thousand members of the pre-1960 Cambodian Communist Party, who had gone into exile at the end of the first Indochina war, were killed at the behest of the KCP when they returned to Cambodia, ostensibly to work for the revolution in 1971-73." (Chandler, 1983-B, pp. 149-50.)

Chandler's report is confirmed and amplified by Sihanouk:

"Last year [1978] . . . Khieu Samphan declared to my wife and myself that these cadres and officers had 'neither the minds nor the hearts of Khmer,' that they had become spies of the 'Viet-minh,' and consequently (I quote) 'We were obliged to rid ourselves of them.' This meant quite simply that this Khmer Viet-minh 'reinforcement' committed by Hanoi in 1970 to support

our anti-American struggle had ended up being [physically] liquidated by the Khmer Rouge." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 265.)

Pol Pot was also quite critical of the Vietnamese for concluding the Paris peace agreements with the U.S. in 1973, calling the Vietnamese action "a betrayal of the Kampuchean revolution." (China took a similar view, provoking General Maxwell Taylor to quip that the Chinese position seemed to be a call to "fight the United States to the last Vietnamese.") As late as 1978, when subsequent events had already demonstrated that the Paris peace agreements were a major advance for all the revolutionary forces in Indochina because they got the U.S. permanently out of the war under conditions which made its return virtually impossible, the Pol Pot forces held to their earlier subjective viewpoint:

"The Vietnamese were driven into a situation where they thought they had to snap up the bait launched by the U.S. imperialists, that is: 1) cease-fire and elections; 2) U.S. aid of more than 3,000 million dollars. . . . The Vietnamese agreed to negotiate with the U.S. imperialists and to cease-fire, for they could no longer carry on the war and were enticed by the U.S. bait." (*Black Paper*, p. 71.)

As always, struggles of this nature over history are in essence struggles over politics. Nothing, perhaps, is more indicative of Pol Pot's reactionary nationalist outlook than his skewed version of Kampuchea's revolutionary history. To Pol Pot and his faction of the KCP, that history demonstrates that all Vietnamese actions since 1930 had been aimed at a single objective, "to take possession of Kampuchea in order to use her as a springboard for their expansion in Southeast Asia" (*ibid.*, p. 15.) — a view which, perhaps, makes the present-day alliance between the remnant Khmer Rouge, Khmer anticommunists, and the pro-imperialist regimes in Thailand, Singapore, etc., somewhat more understandable.

Did the Vietnamese communists provide invaluable resources and training for the fledgling Kampuchean communist movement? All this meant, according to Pol Pot was that "the first Khmer cadres were made up of the people kidnapped by the Vietnamese. The latter had educated and used them to develop their forces." (*ibid.*, p. 22.)

Did the Vietnamese communists consistently advance slogans designed to underscore the unity and common tasks of the peoples of Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam? These were deceptions, charged Pol Pot: "The Vietnamese used these slogans of solidarity in order to cover their activities of division and sabotage and to infiltrate in Kampuchea's revolutionary movement. . . . The Vietnamese used that formal solidarity to carry out their strategy of 'Indochina Federation' in order to annex and swallow Kampuchea." (*ibid.*, p. 25.)

Did Vietnamese revolutionary fighters establish bases in Kampuchea during the war against the U.S.? Another plot, says the *Black Paper*: "The Vietnamese came to Kampuchea not only to seek refuge, but also to work for annexing and swallowing her. Although they were in the most difficult situation, the Vietnamese continued to everywhere prepare their strategic forces to overthrow Kampuchea's revolutionary power at the propitious moment." (*ibid.*, p. 26.)

And while the *Black Paper* constantly asserts that "the Vietnamese helped Kampuchea in nothing. . . . [and] opposed anything that could make the Kampuchean revolution independent" (*ibid.*, p. 68.), the fact is that proposals by Vietnam to establish joint military commands, military training schools for Khmer Rouge cadre, and even hospitals for the sick and wounded were all rejected by the Pol Pot forces and subsequently cited as proof of Vietnam's perfidious intentions.\*

The ultimate irony of Pol Pot's national exclusivist outlook was that it undermined the very goal it was nominally serving

\*Pol Pot's chauvinist outlook likewise indulged itself in both unwarranted assertions about the achievements of the KCP and ludicrous attempts to belittle the Vietnamese struggle. Thus, the *Black Paper* characterizes the Vietnamese decision to take up the armed struggle in 1960 as stemming from "their catastrophic situation and in order to escape from their total annihilation," rather than as a reflection of the growing strength of the revolutionary movement in response to intensified repression. Pol Pot likewise echoes the views of those like General William Westmoreland and the U.S. right-wing "hawks" that the Vietnamese were on the verge of defeat in 1967-68: "At that time, the Vietnamese uttered lies everywhere to make the world believe that they had achieved 'brilliant victories.' In reality, they took refuge in Kampuchea's territory. . . . They had no more

— Kampuchea's independence and social revolution. To Pol Pot and his faction of the KCP, it was essential that the Kampuchean revolution be won completely independent of the struggle then raging in Vietnam. As a result, any strategy which linked the success of the Kampuchean revolution to the outcome of the Vietnamese struggle was deemed an unacceptable compromise of Khmer national sovereignty.

But such a perspective would hurt not only the Vietnamese revolution and, with it, the cutting edge struggle against imperialism internationally; it would also condemn the Kampuchean revolution to proceed under the least favorable conditions, thereby qualitatively compromising its prospects for victory. Despite Pol Pot's clearly self-serving account of the event, proof of this point came in April, 1975, when Pol Pot's seizure of power in Phnom Penh was made possible principally by the U.S. defeat in Vietnam and the impending overthrow of the Saigon puppet regime. It was this struggle which totally undermined the stability of the Lon Nol regime in Kampuchea.

In fact, it was precisely this overriding common objective contradiction with U.S. imperialism which kept the simmering contradictions between the Pol Pot group and the Vietnamese relatively subdued and undercover during the 1970-75 period.

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territory at home, in South Vietnam, because of Ngo Din Diem's policy of strategic hamlets . . . so that the Vietcongs had neither land nor population." (*Black Paper*, pp. 23-24.)

Perhaps the true measure of this blinding national chauvinism came in Pol Pot's incredible summation of the final crucial phase of the Indochina war. Writing of the period in which the U.S. had been forced to withdraw its troops from Vietnam and ultimately acquiesce in the liberation of the south and of Kampuchea as well, the *Black Paper* declares: "During the period 1970 to 1975, the Kampuchean revolution saved the Vietnamese who were like drowning men engaged in sinking." (*ibid.*, p. 68.)

Even Prince Sihanouk — hardly a friend of the Vietnamese — felt obliged to admonish his Khmer Rouge compatriots: "Deliberately adopting a chauvinistic and dishonest attitude, to the point of denying that the North Vietnamese allies and comrades-in-arms played a preponderant role, to say the least, in stopping, then pushing back the American and South Vietnamese invaders (of Kampuchea) in 1970, 1971 and 1972 is not only insulting to those allies but also an insult to history." (Burchett, 1981, p. 143.)

However, since imperialism had been driven from Indochina and peoples' governments took power in South Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, the reactionary face of Pol Pot's nationalist deviation came into full view, jeopardizing the unity and consolidation of revolutionary power throughout Indochina and threatening not only the development of the Kampuchean revolution but ultimately the Kampuchean nation itself.

## 3

## Pol Pot In Power

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With the U.S. military defeat in Indochina and the seizure of power in Kampuchea by the Khmer Rouge, the Pol Pot forces were now positioned to give full political play to their national chauvinist and ultra-left tendencies. As a result, from April, 1975 to January 7, 1979 the Kampuchean revolution became a grim caricature of itself, a period summed up today by the country's Marxist-Leninist leadership as "the greatest calamity that ever happened to the Kampuchean people." (*Chinese Rulers' Crimes Against Kampuchea*, 1984, p. 3.)

The facts of this "calamity" have certainly been well-documented by now: death on a scale warranting use of the word "genocide" to measure it; dismantling of much of the country's economic infrastructure, including most of its factories, and all of its internal markets; forced evacuation of the cities and the establishment of a system of virtual slave labor into which the displaced urban population was forcibly impressed; abolition of all schools above the primary level; elimination of most of Kampuchea's trained professionals; closing and abandonment of virtually all hospitals, persecution of doctors and other trained medical personnel, shutdown of the nation's pharmacies and the elimination of most modern-day medicine — the net result of these policies being a national health disaster for the Kampuchean people; the shutdown of all libraries, bookstores and publishing centers; forcible suppression of religion; abolition of wages and currency; decimation of the KCP with the killing of most of the party's Marxist-Leninist cadres; and, not least of all, a suicidal war against Vietnam.

The early warnings of bourgeois investigators which many



of us on the left simply dismissed as imperialist propaganda have been all too grimly confirmed by the Kampuchean people themselves. Even former left-wing supporters of the Pol Pot government as well as Khmer Rouge leaders themselves now acknowledge that "serious mistakes" were made during this period.

The source of this catastrophe can be traced directly to the nationalist deviation which Pol Pot brought into the Kampuchean communist movement and the policies he developed on the basis of that deviation. The suicidal war with Vietnam, the bizarre, ultra-left experiment in social engineering which comprised Pol Pot's conception of the Kampuchean road to communism and the ruthless killing of opposition within the KCP were rooted in this narrow nationalist outlook. In this section, we will examine the underlying logic and the actual policies pursued by the Khmer Rouge in these areas.

### The War with Vietnam

Within weeks of the liberation of Phnom Penh (April 17, 1975) and Saigon (April 30, 1975), the long-smoldering antagonisms between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese communists took a new and even more serious military turn. No longer was this a clash between two revolutionary movements. Now both forces held state power on opposite sides of a common border.

Although Pol Pot's Maoist apologists continue to assert that these clashes, culminating in the outbreak of full-scale hostilities in late 1978, stemmed from Vietnam's "expansionist" objectives, more sober-minded sources such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 3, 1980) acknowledged that it was the Pol Pot regime which "foolishly goaded Vietnam into the invasion that brought about its own downfall."

Sihanouk likewise acknowledges that "Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge made provocations against the Vietnamese from when Pol Pot took power in 1975 to 1977. In 1978 Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge had more and more clashes with the Vietnamese." (Sihanouk, 1985, p. 22.)

By all accounts, there was a qualitative escalation in hostilities sometime in mid-1977 following the suppression of the

*anti-Pol Pot faction of the KCP whose main base area was the Eastern Zone area bordering on Vietnam.\** There seems little doubt that the forcible liquidation of the Eastern Zone opposition to Pol Pot was the crucial development which, in effect, cleared the way for the conflict to reach a new level.

Even captured Pol Pot documents and interviews with former KCP cadres and soldiers confirm the fact that during most of 1977 and all of 1978 Kampuchean forces were engaged in widespread offensive military activity all along the Vietnamese border, and were even operating within Vietnam. One Phnom Penh radio broadcast declared:

"By January 6, 1978, we had completely swept all Vietnamese forces out of our national territory. . . . We continued to fight them until the end of January, 1978. In February, 1978 we went on attacking, and our attacks were even more powerful, since all our attacking columns were of division size. After crushing the enemy we immediately sent our units to fight him on his own territory." (*The Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict, 1979*, p. 27.)

Earlier, a report of a July 17, 1977 Eastern Zone Conference of the KCP predicting a large-scale border war with Vietnam included the following explicit statement: "We must also be prepared to go into enemy territory to collect intelligence . . . in order to prepare for victorious attacks." (Chandler and Kiernan, 1983, p. 171.)

The diplomatic history of the conflict is also quite revealing. In April, 1978, Hanoi sent an urgent message to Pol Pot proposing a simple three-point plan for resolving the conflict. It called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of all military forces on both sides five kilometers from the border; a conference to be held in Hanoi, Phnom Penh or a border point to discuss and conclude both a friendship treaty and a border treaty "on the basis of respect for each other's territorial sovereignty within the existing border"; and it suggested "an appropriate form of international guarantee and supervision"

\*For a detailed discussion of the struggle between Pol Pot and his opposition from within the Kampuchean communist movement, see pp. 66-74.

acceptable to both sides.

Pol Pot's response was a propaganda ruse calling on Vietnam to stop its attacks on Kampuchea, to stop "carrying out any act of subversion and interference in the internal affairs of Democratic Kampuchea," to "abandon the strategy" of setting up an "Indochinese federation," etc. If Vietnam complied with these demands "through concrete acts . . . within a period of seven months," said Phnom Penh's note, then conditions might be right for a meeting.

In the face of this Khmer Rouge ploy, the Vietnamese restated their original proposal and simplified it even further by aiming it at merely ending armed hostilities. This time, Hanoi suggested *only* a cease-fire statement and the five kilometer withdrawal from the border and a meeting of Vietnamese and Kampuchean diplomats "in Vientiane or another mutually acceptable capital" in order to set "the date, place and level of a meeting" between the two governments. This proposal was also rejected by the Pol Pot government. (Full text of the two Vietnamese notes and the Kampuchean note are to be found in *Kampuchea Dossier II*, 1978.)

However, even more persuasive than such factual evidence, is the fact that Pol Pot had clearly enunciated the political objectives which propelled the Khmer Rouge toward armed conflict with Vietnam. That objective was explained to Sihanouk personally in 1975 by two of the Khmer Rouge's leading political figures, Khieu Samphan and Son Sen: "In the past, they said, our leaders sold out Kampuchea Krom, sold out South Vietnam to the Vietnamese. Our armies can't accept the status quo. We must make war against Vietnam to get back Kampuchea Krom." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 236.)

Kampuchean refugees interviewed by Ben Kiernan in France during 1979-80 likewise reported on Khmer Rouge intentions. One woman tells of a Khmer Rouge cadre, newly arrived to her province in late 1977, telling a local meeting that "Kampuchea aimed to fight to recover Kampuchea Krom from Vietnam, as well as Surin and other provinces from Thailand." Another refugee recalled that the director of a "mineral factory" had told a meeting that "We aim to liberate the people of Kampuchea Krom and have already liberated 10 to 20 thousand of them."

One young man who had been in Siem Reap Province in March, 1978 recalled the agitation accompanying a campaign to recruit village youths to the Khmer Rouge army:

"At a meeting of 1,000 people in the village where I worked, the Southwestern cadres put up banners denouncing the 'Vietnamese aggressors of our land who are trying to form an Indochina federation.' . . . We sat on the ground during the meeting, which lasted from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. The village chief talked about how the people resolved to work hard so that guns and ammunition could be bought to defend the country. . . . Then the big leader spoke. His name was Ta Meng; he was about 50 years old, and killed people like anything, right in front of others. He talked about how the country had developed, showing photographs, and about the war between the Revolutionary Army and the Vietnamese. He said they had killed 30,000 Vietnamese in Svay Rieng Province, destroyed 50 tanks and shot down four Russian planes. . . . Their plan was to take back Kampuchea Krom. He said that the Vietnamese were swallows of Khmer land and that 'The Khmer people resolved to liberate again the Khmer land in Kampuchea Krom.' " (Kiernan, 1980, pp. 62-63.)

Such comments clearly go far beyond what many Pol Pot defenders have argued, namely that all the Khmer Rouge wanted was to effect some *minor adjustments* to the common Vietnamese-Kampuchean border. In fact, Pol Pot's territorial claims on Vietnam were absolutely provocative.

### Reopening the Border Question

The outstanding questions about the Vietnam-Kampuchea border had been settled in 1967 when Prince Sihanouk had called on all countries wishing normal relations "to recognize the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia within its frontiers as defined in maps used in 1954."

Within three weeks, the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam responded, stating that it "(1) reaffirms its consistent stand to recognize, and undertakes to respect, Cambodian territorial integrity within its existing borders and (2) recognizes and undertakes to respect the existing frontiers between South Vietnam and Cambodia." A week later, North Vietnam issued a similar statement — *on the basis of which normal diplomatic relations were then established between*

*Vietnam and Kampuchea.* (Burchett, 1981, p. 142.)

Thereafter the border question between the two countries was viewed as settled, until the Khmer Rouge reopened the question by military means because it was not ready to accept Sihanouk's formula.

Even so, if Pol Pot's objective had been merely a minor readjustment of the common border between Vietnam and Kampuchea, such a goal would hardly have required the major military effort that the Khmer Rouge pursued. Indeed, there is no record of Pol Pot even trying to negotiate the border question with Vietnam in a serious way prior to opening armed hostilities. The reason can be simply stated. The Pol Pot regime had much more in mind than a few miles of border area. Its real goal was the restoration of a "greater Kampuchea" based on the boundaries of the ancient Angkor Empire which reached its zenith in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This is the significance of the Khmer Rouge's stated goal of "liberating" Kampuchea Krom. For by Kampuchea Krom the Pol Pot forces meant, in their own words:

"It is the part of the territory of the present South Vietnam including the western region of Donai's river and the Mekong's delta. France called it 'Cochinchine.' This territory had been an integral part of Kampuchea since more than 2,000 years. The Vietnamese began to encroach on this territory at the beginning of the 17th century. In 1623, they obtained the authorization to come and trade in Prey Nokor, which they afterwards named Saigon." (*Black Paper*, p. 6.)

Kampuchea Krom, in other words, includes modern-day Vietnam's most fertile food production area, the Mekong delta, and its largest urban center, Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). But these territories claimed by Pol Pot — despite past inclusion in the ancient Angkor empire — are today overwhelmingly Vietnamese in population and have been for hundreds of years.\*

\*If all this has a familiar ring, it is because of its resemblance to another reactionary nationalist tendency cloaking itself in the claims of ancient history — Zionism — which likewise drives long-settled populations off the land, exterminates them and makes reference to ancient territorial claims in order to justify itself.

Pol Pot did not even bother to charge that the Khmer minority in Vietnam was in any way mistreated, abused, prevented from practicing their religion or using their language, or in anyway denied their full and equal rights as citizens in Vietnam. (On the other hand, given the experience of people of Vietnamese ancestry in Pol Pot's Kampuchea, it takes little imagination to visualize the terror that would have been inflicted upon Vietnamese people if Pol Pot's ambitions in southern Vietnam had been realized. Pol Pot's forces considered the Vietnamese minority in Kampuchea to be politically unreliable; they were denied rights as citizens, forcibly dispossessed of their lands, and in many cases executed solely for being of Vietnamese origin.)

Since Vietnam could hardly be expected to turn the Mekong Delta, Ho Chi Minh City and substantial portions of southern Vietnam over to the Khmer Rouge voluntarily, it was obvious that Pol Pot's ambitions could only be realized by war. But how could Kampuchea, with a population of only seven million, imagine that it could defeat Vietnam, which had a population seven times larger and the second biggest army in Asia, battle-hardened and well-equipped?

Indeed, at the time many people, simply on the basis of this disparity between the two countries, decided that it was not possible for Kampuchea to be the aggressor since such a policy would indicate a total absence of sanity in Phnom Penh. However, a closer examination reveals the underlying logic — elements of which are irrational, others not at all.

First of all, the Pol Pot regime has become notorious for its gross departures from materialism on a wide range of questions. Consequently, it is not hard to imagine its leadership, imbued with strongly held national chauvinist sentiments, likewise losing touch with reality in military matters. One example of such a tendency is the Pol Pot-cultivated myth of the "invincibility" of the Kampuchean army, as reflected in a May 2, 1978 Phnom Penh radio broadcast which provides a telling insight into Pol Pot's political goals as well as his illusions: "So far, we have attained our target: 30 Vietnamese killed for every fallen Kampuchean. . . . So we could sacrifice two million Kampuchians in order to exterminate the 50 million Vietnamese — and we shall still be six million." (*The Vietnam-Kampuchean*

*Conflict*, 1979, p. 27.)

Beyond this inflated assessment of the military capacity of the Kampuchean soldiers and Pol Pot's brutal callousness in spilling Kampuchean blood in order to regain ancient glories, he undoubtedly also imagined that the Khmer ethnic minority would *at the least* welcome Kampuchean troops as liberators when they made their move into Vietnam to reclaim the "lost" lands of the old Angkor empire.

However Pol Pot's scheme begins to take on the semblance of a strategy with some chance to succeed only when Kampuchea's war with Vietnam is seen as merely one front in a larger operation that would also involve the armed might of the People's Republic of China. Under those circumstances it is not at all difficult to see how Pol Pot might imagine that a Kampuchean ally of China might emerge from such a war victorious.

In fact, the Chinese troops massed on Vietnam's northern border were a central calculation in Pol Pot's assessment of the military balance of forces between Kampuchea and Vietnam. Thus the *Black Paper* notes:

"In the forthcoming dry season, from November 1978 up, Vietnam would be able to use [only] up to six or seven divisions. It will not dare to send many troops from North Vietnam in order not to withdraw its garrison from the northern border with China. At the border of Svay Rieng province, in August, 1978, it could send only one regiment in support. And the regiment had only 600 men whereas before, one Vietnamese regiment had from 1,800 to 2,000 men." (*Black Paper*, pp. 87-88.)

In short, once China is factored in as a major element in Pol Pot's calculations, his ambitions do not appear so preposterous. Then China's fierce propaganda campaign in 1978, directed at the Hoa minority (people of ethnic Chinese descent) in Vietnam warning that "war between Kampuchea and Vietnam was coming" and charging that the Vietnamese authorities would viciously suppress the Hoa people, likewise falls into place. China's propaganda campaign was launched *at the same time* as Pol Pot initiated the escalation of the border war with Vietnam.\*

\*The contradictions between the Chinese and Vietnamese parties have a

Unfortunately for Pol Pot, however, his assessment of China's capacities — and even possibly its intentions — was no more accurate than his estimates of Vietnamese capacities and intentions. Pol Pot's strategy would seem to have been to provoke the Vietnamese into an invasion that would force China into a full-scale war with Vietnam. But Hanoi had taken the wise precaution of signing a widely publicized mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union a month before Vietnam sent its troops into Kampuchea to oust the Pol Pot government. This relationship constituted a substantial check on China. Thus China's retaliatory attack on Vietnam in February, 1979, which quickly bogged down in the face of determined Vietnamese resistance, was hemmed in by Moscow's pledge to assist Vietnam militarily if requested to do so.

The ultimate hypocrisy of Pol Pot's national chauvinist outlook is its inherently self-defeating character. In search of a "pure" road to revolution, one completely free of foreign inter-

long history and have taken numerous forms. The Vietnamese refusal to ally itself with the CPC's bid for leadership of the international communist movement on the basis of Mao's "anti-revisionist" critique of the Soviet Union, which they considered dubious theoretically and factually, was probably the principal factor which undermined Chinese ambitions in this area. In addition the Vietnam Workers' Party was clearly unsympathetic to China's Cultural Revolution, which it considered a major deviation from materialism. But underlying even such important line differences is the fact that China's aspirations to become a third "superpower" were completely bound up with its capacity to turn Southeast Asia into its own geo-political sphere of influence — a development which would unquestionably be blocked should the internationalist outlook of the Vietnam Workers' Party become the dominant ideological force in a liberated Indochina.

The dilemma posed to Maoism was that while Chinese national interests required that the threatening presence of the imperialist countries — especially the U.S. — be curtailed, an unalloyed triumph based largely on the success of the Vietnamese struggle, which would lead to a strong Indochina independent of Beijing, was likewise deemed unacceptable. For this reason, Chinese policy in Indochina for some 30 years has been directed toward helping the peoples of that region oust the French and U.S. imperialists but at the same time preventing the full consolidation of their unity. (For a fuller discussion and documentation of this thesis, see *The Truth About Vietnam-China Relations Over the Past 30 Years*, 1979, published by Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

ference and entanglements, Pol Pot wrenched Kampuchea out of its natural alliance with the other Indochinese countries and made his regime a pawn in an even more dangerous "great nation" strategy of Chinese Maoism. And when the moment of truth came, Deng Xiaoping's implied or explicit guarantees and promises failed to materialize.

However, the Pol Pot regime's distortions and miscalculations in foreign policy were equaled or surpassed in the realm of domestic policy, resulting in an almost total lack of mass support by January 7, 1979 — a day hailed by the vast majority of Kampucheans as one of liberation and national salvation.

### Pol Pot's "Socialism"

Pol Pot's notion of "socialism" and the Kampuchean "path" to it is probably the greatest caricature ever advanced in practice under the name of Marxism. The Khmer Rouge "experiment" made even the worst excesses of Mao's Cultural Revolution look like a model of materialism. The Pol Pot faction's infantile leftism intersected with and was reinforced by its nationalist deviation. Attempting to advance the Khmer nation with as little "outside" assistance or interference as possible, the Khmer Rouge promoted a mystical glorification of the class most "uncontaminated" by the outside world — the peasantry. In this way the characteristic petty bourgeois socialism of the radicalized intelligentsia became invested with the moral authority of the toiling masses. But the departure from the proletarian worldview remained qualitative nonetheless. Pol Pot's conception of socialism was essentially a peasant-based, instantly achieved egalitarian society. And although a smattering of Marxist terminology was used to describe this process, there was nothing at all Marxist about the bizarre experiment in socialism that resulted.

How closely this ultra-leftism was linked to a sense of national exclusiveness — and the immense pressure brought to bear on both party and non-party people to drink up this ideological brew — is revealed in a typical commentary heard over Kampuchean radio in 1978:

"When you compare our revolution with other countries' revolutions, you will see that there is a great difference between us

and other countries. For example, other countries have a currency, a wage system, market places and private property. In a word, we are not like other countries. In this case, should you stand on our side or the side of other people? If you opt for the latter, willingly or not, you have deserted our side. So, without a clear line between us and other people, little by little the enemy's view and ideology will creep into your minds and make you lose all sense of distinction between us and the enemy. This is very dangerous. It is possible that several of our comrades have fallen into this trap." (Chandler, 1983-A, pp. 46-47.)

Particularly noteworthy in this comment is the passage from "other countries" to "other people" to "the enemy." Ieng Sary, Foreign Minister of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) and one of the three top figures in the Pol Pot faction, was not off the mark, therefore, when he declared: "The Khmer revolution [that is, the Pol Pot program — I.S.] has no precedent. What we are trying to do has never been done before in history." (Chandler, 1983-A, p. 34.) It is worth keeping in mind that Pol Pot's "socialism" was looked at by many on the left at the time as a virtual model for an "anti-revisionist" path to socialism. Thus Stephen Heder, comparing the perspectives for socialist development in Vietnam and Kampuchea, argued in 1978 that "each revolution stands as an explicit critique of the other." (Heder, 1978, p. 3.)

Enthusiastic over Pol Pot's experiment and taking a dim view of Vietnam's revolutionary credentials, Heder wrote:

"Vietnamese revolutionaries have held state power in the north for nearly a quarter of a century. Hence in a pattern typical of governing revolutionary parties, the routinizing requirements of running a state have gradually transformed their revolutionary exuberance into either administrative efficiency or administrative stagnation. . . . In Kampuchea, on the other hand, the primary experience of all cadre is with quite recent and intense military and class conflict. Their administrative experience is limited, and administration remains *ad hoc*, with revolutionary zeal the overwhelming administrative theme. Experiment and chaos rather than efficiency or stagnation appear to be the outstanding characteristics of the new Kampuchean state." (*ibid.*, p. 5.)

Although acknowledging Vietnamese disagreement with many of the perspectives advanced by Nikita Khrushchev dur-

ing the 1956-1964 period, Heder nevertheless believes that the Vietnamese communists were quite soft on "revisionism."

"It [the Vietnam Workers' Party] did not join the debate over the proper internal policies of ruling communist parties or launch an insistent or violent campaign against 'revisionism' within its own ranks. This complacency about internal revisionism dovetailed with the Vietnamese party's de-emphasis on class struggle\*. . . . The Kampuchean Communist Party, on the other hand, was born and grew up in the midst of the debate. Like most other non-ruling Asian communist parties in the 1960s, it took the issue of revisionism very seriously, quickly taking a staunch and vigilant anti-revisionist position. The KCP's struggle against revisionism fit well with its radical classist tendencies." (*ibid.*, p. 7.)

Heder's viewpoint, which I have cited here because it is typical of an outlook that had considerable currency on the left at that time, helps to cast light on a particular strain among those who considered themselves "anti-revisionist" in the 1960s and '70s — a tendency to view Marxism's historical materialist emphasis on the role of society's productive forces in establishing the material foundation for the development of socialism as being in and of itself a sign of "revisionism."\*\*

Such "anti-revisionism" has had few opportunities to be act-

\*Heder's narrow conception of "class struggle" is a sobering reminder of Maoism's failure to situate the class struggle in an international context. Only a rigidly doctrinaire view of the class struggle as a phenomenon exclusively *internal* to countries could produce the view that the Vietnamese communists who, at the time, were waging a heroic and all-out war against imperialism on behalf of socialism — that is, class struggle on the international terrain — were "de-emphasizing" class struggle.

\*\*The most prominent figures advancing this point of view have been Mao Zedong, who based the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China on it, and a school of New Left-inspired "Western Marxists" typified by Louis Althusser and Charles Bettelheim. For an elaborated discussion of this thesis, see the following: "Capitalism in the USSR? An Opportunist Theory in Disarray," by Bruce Occena and Irwin Silber, in *Line of March* #3 and #4; "Althusserian Marxism, A Beginning Critique," by the *Line of March* Editorial Board, in *Line of March* #6 and #7; "Symposium on Paul Sweezy's Theory of Post-Revolutionary Society," in *Line of March* #10; "Exchange with Paul Sweezy," in *Line of March* #12.

ually tested in practice. To be exact, only twice: China's cultural revolution and Pol Pot's even more radical version of it. A closer look at Pol Pot's "socialism," therefore, will be useful not only for understanding the nature of the disaster that befell Kampuchea from 1975 to 1979, but also as a first-hand examination and critique of left-wing, petty bourgeois socialism in practice.

In doing so, we might take the liberty of employing the Maoist style to describe Pol Pot's line on socialist construction as the "Theory of the Three Instants" — instant transition to socialism; instant elimination of all class and social distinctions; and instant transformation of Kampuchean social and ideological life. Let us examine each in turn.

### "Instant Transition to Socialism"

A central tenet of scientific socialism is that while the revolutionary seizure of power sets the indispensable political condition for the socialist transformation of society, the development of a fully socialist society unfolds through a series of stages. The nature of these stages will, of course, vary from one country to another depending on the particular conditions encountered. However, the view that the economic foundation of society could be changed overnight, and that the class-based distinctions inherited from the old society would disappear simply by virtue of the revolution's victory (i.e., the political seizure of power) has been deemed a thoroughly idealist view by historical materialists ever since Marx's time.

In particular in Kampuchea, where the content of the revolutionary struggle was principally for national democracy, where the economic level of development in terms of a world scale was extremely backward, and where the proletariat was still a minuscule class, Pol Pot nevertheless declared immediately on seizing power:

"April 17 marks the one hundred percent completion of the national democratic revolution. It also marks the *one hundred percent completion of the socialist revolution*. No longer are there exploiting classes or private ownership in Kampuchea." (Thanh Tin, 1979, p. 28; our emphasis.)

In fact Pol Pot viewed the very idea of "transition phases" to



socialism as "reformist" or "revisionist," boasting to Sihanouk in typically chauvinist fashion:

"We want to have our name in history as the ones who can reach total communism with one leap forward. So we have to be more extremist than Madame Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution leadership in China. We want to be known as the only communist party to communize a country without a step-by-step policy, without going through socialism." (Sihanouk, 1985, p. 24.)

It is hard to imagine a more drastic break with the most elementary principles of scientific socialism. Nor do we need Sihanouk's word for it that such indeed was the perspective which guided Pol Pot and his associates — since the actual policies they implemented are themselves the surest proof that the Pol Pot regime engaged in the grossest departure from materialism.

The idea of socialism as an *inevitable* "lower stage" of communism through which society must pass is one of the theoretical cornerstones of Marxism, a critical element in transforming socialism from a utopian dream into a scientific conception. Marx's intellectual "discovery" of socialism as a transitional period bound up with the maturation of the proletariat made it possible, for the first time, to place the socialist project in the hands of an advancing class and in the framework of real history.

After dissecting the arguments of those who speculated on various subjective, idealist schemes for bringing about a communist society, Marx concluded: "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other." ("Critique of the Gotha Programme," *Marx and Engels in One Volume*, p. 331.)

Half a century before the Russian Revolution and subsequent revolutions amply verified this precept in practice, Marx had theoretically anticipated the problem of trying to bring a fully developed socialist (i.e., a communist) society into being overnight. He pointed out that, in the period following the proletariat's seizure of power in any country, society would continue to be characterized by marked inequalities, noting:

"These defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist

society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby. . . . Vulgar socialism has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution." (*ibid.*, pp. 324-25.)

When subjectively advanced by various idealist proponents of socialism in the nineteenth century, the idea of an instant transition from capitalism to communism was a profound theoretical fetter on the capacity of the working class to develop a scientific understanding of the task before it. But when actually put into practice by Pol Pot in Kampuchea in 1975, this thoroughly anti-materialist conception set the conditions for the brutalization of the Kampuchean people which inevitably followed.

#### "Instant Elimination" of Class and Social Distinctions

In accordance with the Maoist idea that a fully egalitarian society can be brought about solely by ideological and political changes, the Pol Pot regime moved immediately after seizing power to make Kampuchea "a classless society." But such a society, which Marxists believe can be realized only in fully developed socialism, implies not only working class political power and a transformation of property relations but — and this is the crucial point — a vast leap in the development of a highly industrialized and mechanized economy.

Why is this so?

First, because historical materialists do not believe that the existing differentials among the people of an entire nation can be transformed simply by the communists decreeing it to be so or "ordering in" a new value system. The foundation for eliminating disparities in income and living conditions among the people is two-fold: expropriating the major concentrations of large, private capital is one. But a revolution in society's productive capacity so that a vast social surplus can be produced, thus making equality on the basis of abundance a real possibil-



ity, is the other indispensable prerequisite.\* Only then can classes disappear by making all members of society members of the working class.

There is also a very practical problem to be faced: any attempt instantly to eliminate class and social distinctions completely will inevitably result — one way or another — in the new society losing the services of the existing trained professionals, scientists, engineers, technicians and intellectuals who have an indispensable transitional role to play in furthering social and economic development at a time when the working class has not yet produced a new generation of proletarianized professionals and intellectuals. This is not simply a theoretical proposition, it is a profoundly practical problem. And the concrete experience of every proletarian revolution in history has had to grapple with it. In fact, failure to take this into account was one of the fatal flaws of the disastrous Cultural Revolution in China.

Yet Pol Pot's idea of an instant classless society flew in the face of all this. In his view, class distinctions would be abolished by transforming the population into one huge peasant class. This conception, together with the more "practical" objective of eliminating all potential sources of opposition to the regime, was the foundation for the key policy measures implemented within days of Pol Pot's seizure of power: mass and near-total evacuation of Kampuchea's cities and relocation of several million urban-dwellers to the countryside to be employed as agricultural laborers.

An October, 1975 meeting of the Party Secretariat summed it up:

"The population displacement policy was our most important policy after April 17, 1975. In implementation of this policy we liquidated all opposition forces and controlled the country at 100 percent. The city people, once scattered in the countryside, would be subjected to control by the basic strata and the

\*Even this implies the recognition of the necessity for the worldwide defeat of imperialism before communism can be concretely realized since the need to oppose and defeat imperialism places an incredible drain on socialism's productive forces.

cooperatives; they would all become peasants." (*The Chinese Rulers' Crimes Against Kampuchea*, 1984, p. 75.)

Now one can hardly deny that such a policy would likely prove effective in curbing the influence of university-trained intellectuals, scientists, engineers, enterprise managers, artists and the like. Unfortunately, it was even more effective in shutting down most of Kampuchea's factories, centers of commerce, science and research, institutions of higher education and the nation's cultural life. It also led to the instant elimination of Kampuchea's already small working class, for without industry and trade the essential condition of being for a proletariat was eliminated.

Consequently, despite its high-blown pseudo-Marxist verbiage about a "classless society," the system actually established by the Pol Pot regime was based largely on the primitive world outlook and bourgeois prejudices generated by the backward condition of a poor peasant class in a country still living in the shadow of feudal social relations\* and colonial domination.

The system's "socialist" cover was based on two dubious claims: one, that the country's agriculture would provide the basis for capital accumulation and the rapid development of the productive forces; and two, that from the outset, agriculture itself would be "socialist," that is, it would be founded on near-total collectivization of the Kampuchean countryside. But in pursuing these goals, the Pol Pot group once again revealed its thoroughly idealist understanding of economics and

\*If Pol Pot's vision of a revitalized peasantry leading Kampuchea's restoration to greatness has any historical precedent, it is with the outlook of the *narodnik* movement of nineteenth century Russia. Like the leading figures of the Pol Pot group, the *narodniks* were also radicalized sons and daughters of Russia's more privileged classes who saw the future bound up not in a working class corrupted by capitalist values but in a romanticized peasantry whose primitive conditions of life most closely resembled their utopian vision of equality.

In Russia, the working class movement began to mature with the Marxist critique (advanced by Plekhanov and Lenin) of the principles and practice of the *narodnik* movement. In Kampuchea, unfortunately, the masses had to endure the consequences of the attempt to put such an outlook into social practice.

its ultra-left conception of revolutionary politics.

A June, 1976 article in *Revolutionary Flags*, the internal organ of the KCP, laid out the regime's vision of an agriculture-based social development:

"We rely on agriculture in order to expand other fields such as industry, factories, minerals, oil, etc. The basic key is agriculture. Self-reliance means capital from agriculture. From 1977, the state will have nothing more to give to the Zone(s)\* because there are no longer any resources. So we must acquire them by exchange, by taking rice from the Zone(s) to make purchases. Health services and social action also rely on agriculture. Doctors are to cure the sick. The important medicine to cure sickness is food. If there was enough to eat there would also be little sickness. It is the same for culture. Once we have the capital, we can expand scientific culture. But now we must produce rice first. Producing rice is a very great lesson. City people do not know what farming is, do not know what a cow is, do not know what harvesting is. Now they know and understand, they are no longer scared of cows and buffaloes. Our lesson's subject is real work. Real work provides experience; if we have the experience, with additional measures it would become scientific. The important point is to solve the food problem first. When we have the food, we will expand simultaneously into the learning of reading, writing and arithmetic." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 242.)

Now Marxist-Leninists would not quarrel with viewing agriculture — especially food production — as a key strategic sector in a larger plan for socialist transformation, especially in a country such as Kampuchea. Self-sufficiency in food is a crucial objective if the country's still meager resources are not to be expended on importing food just to keep the population alive and the work force healthy and functional. Such self-sufficiency implies, of course, not merely enough production to feed all those directly involved in agriculture, but enough of a surplus so that those engaged in other sectors will also have enough to eat.

\*The Pol Pot government abolished Kampuchea's traditional provinces which had evolved historically as the country's political subdivisions, replacing them with seven Zones which served as the basis for all economic, political and administrative control.

Nor is there anything wrong with a conception which sees agricultural production providing the basis for a degree of capital accumulation to be used for the further development of the country's industry.

But aside from the fact that rice is a notoriously poor basis for realizing a significant level of capital accumulation,\* Pol Pot's scenario overlooks one crucial factor: accumulation of a significant surplus in agriculture is totally dependent on large-scale, mechanized crop cultivation, utilizing modern fertilizers and advanced scientific methods. Without such a material foundation, food production — especially in rice — is not likely to rise beyond the level required to sustain the working population at mere subsistence.

Because Pol Pot's pipe-dream had no material foundation, it became a nightmare in practice. Instead of producing a surplus, Pol Pot's economic plan resulted, by the end of 1978, in a marked deterioration in the standard of living for the population as a whole. A death toll — ranging anywhere from "conservative" estimates of a million to the official Kampuchean assessment that more than three million Kampucheans died during the Pol Pot years — was decimating the population. While many were put to death for various kinds of resistance to the regime's policies, by far the largest number of Kampucheans died as a result of hunger, inadequate protection from the elements, and lack of the most basic medical care.

But in the semi-delirious rhetoric typical of the Pol Pot regime, the KCP declared that "The socialist regime in Kampuchea is moving by leaps and bounds towards communism!" (Thanh Thin, 1979, p. 29.) This extravagant claim was advanced on the basis of the near-total "collectivization" of the country's economy and an administratively implemented series of decrees directed at traditional social customs and ideology.

What is true is that the overwhelming majority of Kampucheans — somewhere between 95 and 97 percent of the entire

\*Vietnam, for instance, sees rice production as a basis for feeding the people, but is trying to develop various "industrial" crops — pineapples, cotton, sugar, anise, etc. — as a means of capital accumulation through export.

population — lived and worked on approximately 1,000 collective farms in which all land, draft animals and means of production were "collectivized." But the "socialist" character of Kampuchean agriculture was a farce that would have embarrassed even China's Gang of Four.

In the absence of large-scale mechanized production, without wages, currency or markets, with no private plots for auxiliary production, Kampuchea's peasants — especially those who had been forcibly relocated from the urban areas — were in truth nothing but a slave labor force.

One of the most detailed descriptions of what Pol Pot's "socialism" looked like in practice on a society-wide scale is provided by a Finnish Kampuchea Inquiry Commission\* from whose report the following is taken:

"On the collectives, people were divided into various categories in a very hierarchical manner. The basic division was between the 'new' and the 'old' people. The Khmer Rouge system of administration was based on the loyalty they enjoyed from the peasants of the areas under their control during the war. With the aim of reinforcing this loyalty the urban population — which formerly had been regarded as an elite — was reduced to the most abject conditions on the collective farms. The 'new people' were forced to do the heaviest work; their food and housing were bleak; their families were often broken up; and, for example, they did not receive medicines in the same quantity as the 'old people.' . . .

"Soldiers, village leaders and the cadres of the Communist Party were recruited from among the poorest of the peasantry; typically they were young, even small teenage boys. . . . Supervision of the collective farms was in their hands and often also an absolute power which could lead to random executions for the merest show of insubordination.

\*Established in 1980 "to study the political, social and economic development of Kampuchea and the subsequent legal implications and repercussions on international politics," the commission was made up of a group of distinguished Finnish academics, journalists and governmental figures. Starting from "a position of strict neutrality, with no preconceived goal or ambition," the commission published its report in Helsinki in December, 1982. It was subsequently edited by Kimmo Kiljunen and published in English in book form under the title *Kampuchea: Decade of the Genocide*, by Zed Books, in 1984.

"Life on the collectives was extremely monotonous and it was attempted to do away with any individuality. The week consisted of ten days and each tenth day was used for 'political education' when mass meetings were held in which discussions mainly concerned improvements in work practices and increased work efficiency. Long working days were spent in the rice paddies or in digging irrigation canals. Not only was production collectivized, but also consumption, when collective meals were introduced in 1977. Trade by individuals was, in general, not possible — if only for the reason that money was not in use. Thus, neither was there any real system of wages. Through the collective, people received their meager food rations and a simple black garment. Life outside the collective farms was impossible. On some collective farms men and women were segregated and meetings between married couples were limited. Extramarital sexual relations were forbidden and in some places even forced marriages were arranged.

"In addition to the fact that the ending of the use of money and direct physical control bound people to the collectives, the Kampucheans lived a life of isolation from both one another and the outside world. There were no postal or telephone services, or any mass media except for the radio and a newspaper which appeared irregularly and which had a very restricted circulation. Books and libraries were not used; the educational system functioned on a primitive level or not at all; the level of medical services was also very low, often being based on the use of herbs and other folk remedies because imported medicines were banned and hospitals were not functioning. The practice of religion was forbidden and the pagodas were systematically destroyed.

"Not only did each of the collective farms attempt to get by on its own as much as possible, but also the whole of the national economy was characterized by a striving for self-reliance and even autarky. In this respect Democratic Kampuchea was isolated from the outside world. Foreign trade was extremely limited: during 1977-8, some rice was exported and was exchanged through trading houses in Hong Kong and Singapore for essential goods. What industry there was in the country used local materials to produce simple consumer goods — clothes, dishes, building materials, tools, for instance.

"These facilities were mainly a matter of small workshops. The long-term goal was a sufficiently developed level of industrialization, but one implemented on the basis of local produc-

tion prerequisites and thus as far as possible independent of imported production elements." (Kiljunen, 1984, pp. 17-18.)

The result of all this may have given the appearance of a "classless" society, but Pol Pot's leveling process had nothing in common with Marxism or with genuine equality. Far from contributing to Kampuchea's advancement based on improving and increasing the productive forces, the Pol Pot regime dismantled much of what already existed and made a virtue out of backwardness. In Pol Pot's Kampuchea the only "equality" was the equality of the grave — and for large numbers of Kampucheans this was a merciless reality not simply a literary image.

#### "Instant Transformation of Kampuchean Social and Ideological Life"

Since Pol Pot's attempt to "communize" Kampuchean society unfolded without regard to — indeed, in defiance of — a qualitative advance in the level of the forces of production, it could only come about ideologically. Thus, Pol Pot tried to impose what he considered to be a "communist" value system irrespective of the economic base which might have made it possible.

In pursuit of this aim, belief systems and social institutions historically developed in Kampuchea were arbitrarily modified or abolished by the Khmer Rouge without regard to the consciousness of the masses or the social conditions in which they lived. Affected were religion, family life, education, sexual attitudes and relations, and culture. The results were not only bizarre; they ultimately turned out to be macabre.

Absent a plan for revolutionizing society's productive forces, thus laying the foundation for socialist relations of production and thereby gradually transforming the social outlook of the masses in general, the central criterion employed by the Khmer Rouge in determining ideological purity was class origin.\* The ideal was the poor peasant whose moral virtues

\*The notable exception was the inner core leadership of the KCP itself, virtually all of whose members came from the privileged classes. Almost all had been university students in France during the 1950s — a status

had supposedly been shaped by hard physical labor and a relative lack of "contamination" by bourgeois and foreign ideology. A central goal of the mass evacuation of Kampuchea's cities was precisely to eliminate what were considered to be the festering places of non-Kampuchean and non-peasant ideas and practices. Even in the countryside, the displaced and relocated urban population — whether shopkeeper or factory worker, trained professional or pedicab-driver — was considered less "reliable" than the poor peasants. In time, persecution of these "unreliable" elements became so extensive that those with skills or an advanced education tried to pass themselves off as ignorant and of completely humble origin.

This aspect of Khmer Rouge rule has, by now, been extensively authenticated. Even among Pol Pot's present political backers, there are few who will deny that, at the very least, there were some "unfortunate" aspects to his version of socialism, usually described as "excesses." But such half-hearted criticisms are not only useless; they tend to obscure the real nature of the Pol Pot deviation which was not an "excess" of zeal in the implementation of otherwise admirable objectives but a total aberration of Marxist principle and method.

For instance, while Marxism is founded on philosophical opposition to religion, communists uphold freedom of religious belief and practice. Not so the Khmer Rouge, whose stated policy, in a country in which 95 percent of the population was Buddhist, was that "Buddhism is a tool of the exploiters, so it cannot be allowed to remain in existence in Kampuchea." (*The Chinese Rulers' Crimes Against Kampuchea*, 1984, p. 76.)

Michael Vickery, while noting that the DK constitution formally upheld freedom of religion, declares that "In practice, no religious activities were tolerated." (Vickery, 1984, p. 179.) The temples and pagodas were closed and the monks, without

hardly accessible to those who came from the laboring classes. Kiernan reports that Pol Pot's "father was a well-known landowner (in Kompong Thom Province) who had a herd of 30-40 buffaloes, employed about 40 laborers at harvest time and often sponsored village festivals." A cousin, says Kiernan, "had been one of the prominent wives of King Monivong (Sihanouk's predecessor) and his sister, Neak Moneang Roeung, also held a title as one of the King's concubines." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 22.)

exception, were assigned to "productive labor" in agriculture.

Education under Pol Pot suffered a similar fate. With the apparent exception of the lowest primary grades, all formal schooling in Kampuchea was abolished and virtually all school-teachers — who were automatically suspect by virtue of their own advanced education — were driven to work as agricultural laborers. Such schooling as there was would seem to have been entrusted only to "reliable" class elements whose own level of knowledge and literacy was frequently only one step ahead of their pupils. By and large, according to Vickery, Khmer Rouge cadres viewed "higher education as useless and people who had obtained it less reliable than the uneducated." (*ibid.*, p. 173.)

Pol Pot's goal of instant ideological transformation also challenged the traditional Kampuchean family as a viable social institution. Typical of predominantly agricultural, semi-feudal societies, extended families were the Kampuchean norm, providing an extensive support system both economically and socially. Khmer Rouge policy, concludes Vickery, was aimed at, "transferring parental authority over adults to the state and breaking down the extended family into nuclear units. The latter was the Khmer Rouge's ideal, and destruction of large extended families as cohesive groups probably was an element of deliberate policy. Where new villages were constructed, houses were too small for more than parents and children, so that even if a large extended family lived close together . . . they were forced to divide themselves into nuclear units." (*ibid.*, p. 175.)

Equally important, breaking up the extended family set the basis for making private, family-owned farming impossible in Kampuchea. For at the existing level of development of the productive forces, the nuclear family could not be a viable economic unit in the Kampuchean countryside. Accordingly, all of the ideological values and virtues of the extended family came under attack and *new institutions* — such as the forced communal dining halls which were apparently introduced in 1977 — were established.

The goal of ultimately transferring society's ideological authority from the family and the church to the revolutionary state is not, in itself, reactionary. In a socialist society, where the proletariat holds state power, this is actually a liberating

process which emancipates the individual from the tyranny of outmoded tradition and establishes new value systems closely tied to progress and social welfare. But the ability of the state power to effect that transfer is completely bound up with its capacity to demonstrate in a most practical way the advanced economic, social, cultural and intellectual role played by the state authority, a process which requires considerable time, an economy of abundance, and can only be accomplished by persuasion and not force.

Pol Pot's ultra-leftism, however, considered any concern with setting the material foundations for such cultural changes or any delay in implementing them as "revisionist." Accordingly, the Khmer Rouge devised norms of social and cultural behavior which it simply mandated. In addition, the Pol Pot code of behavior looked backward into the past, not to the future. Ironically, much of the traditional ideological authority exercised by the family and by religion was already breaking down before the Khmer Rouge came to power, the result of social changes taking place in Kampuchean society as a whole, the country's growing urbanization and the growing influence of more modern institutions and mores. In this light, the new policies devised by the Khmer Rouge government were, in many respects, retrogressive — re-establishing older norms but now on a secular basis and with the authority of the state power. Vickery's comment on this process is insightful:

"By 1970 it was no longer unusual for a perfectly respectable girl to insist on choosing her own husband, even running away temporarily if necessary, and to refuse to have the marriage registered in order to be able to divorce more easily if things should turn out badly. Urban matrons, with surprising frequency, were beginning to think of repaying husbands' infidelities in kind; and even though most young middle-class women still considered monogamy their ideal, few of them held any prejudice against their sisters who made other choices.

"Thus traditional morality and the traditional family were changing rapidly, and for those who disapproved of the changes they were breaking down. The DK authorities restored traditional morality, but with a vengeance; and the peasant cadres who administered the rules probably believed there were saving the Cambodian family from urban corruption." (*ibid.*, p. 177.)

Under the new "rules," according to Vickery, marriages "could be contracted only after securing the permission of the authorities, and one of the criteria for permission to marry was that the couple should be of the same political class." (*ibid.*, p. 175.)

Extra-marital sex was strictly forbidden and was not infrequently punished by death. In the same vein, a party resolution, which speaks for itself, solemnly declared: "We must eliminate the habit of adorning oneself. Wearing long hair, colored or patterned clothes or shoes are all attempts to beautify. They are backward and harmful. Self-adornment is imperialist, feudalist and capitalist." (Thanh Tin, 1979, p. 29.)

Pol Pot's formula for an instant leap to communism was a leap backward toward barbarianism — an instant leveling process and an instant (and not infrequently reactionary) ideological transformation of the masses that was totally at odds with social reality. In typically infantile left fashion, the KCP tried to substitute the wishes of the "communists" — if we can call them such — for the consciousness of the masses, arbitrarily imposing new social relations and ideological values without first obtaining popular support for them. The inevitable result, then, was mass repression and terror.

However, the Pol Pot nightmare inevitably met with widespread resistance among the Kampuchean people. This took diverse forms, but the most determined and conscious was the resistance waged by Kampuchean Marxist-Leninists.

### The Struggle Within the Kampuchean Communist Movement

The xenophobic and ultra-left general line of the KCP under the leadership of Pol Pot did not win hegemony in the KCP without a fierce struggle — a struggle in which most of Kampuchea's Marxist-Leninists lost their lives. This point is worth emphasizing because there is a widespread tendency to view events in Indochina since 1975 simply in terms of a conflict between Kampuchea and Vietnam. In fact, the line of the Pol Pot faction of the KCP — which did not emerge in a clearly recognizable fashion until after the seizure of power in 1975 — represented a radical break with the main line of development

of the Kampuchean communist movement and was fiercely opposed by a large section of it.

Fundamentally, the rise of the Pol Pot faction in the Kampuchean communist movement reflected the consolidation of a nationalist deviation completely at odds with internationalism and Marxism-Leninism. Of course, in a broad historical sense, pronounced nationalist tendencies are inevitable and frequently progressive in the present epoch of the worldwide struggle against imperialism. In many countries, revolutionary nationalism has played a decisive role in unleashing class forces to throw off the yoke of colonial domination. Revolutionary nationalist regimes have also often played a useful role in aiding other national liberation struggles and even in opposing imperialism's maneuvers against existing socialism.

This political reality corresponds to the fact that in the epoch of imperialism, the struggle for national democracy — particularly in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America — has been the natural focus of the spontaneous movement against national oppression. Unlike the Trotskyists, therefore, the communists actively take up the struggle for national democracy *as a distinct stage in the proletarian revolution with its own laws of development*. In doing so, the communists seek to ally with those revolutionary nationalist forces which emerge spontaneously in the struggle against national oppression and imperialism.

Nevertheless, the communists can never afford to forget that a movement built on exclusively or predominantly nationalist foundations is inherently unstable for it does not grasp the objective interdependence of the international struggle against imperialism and will ultimately show a marked tendency to surrender or compromise the political objectives of the national democratic revolution.\*

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\*In an earlier period when the struggle between the imperialist powers for the redivision of the world was a more prominent feature of the imperialist system, it was not at all uncommon for one imperialist power to promote a nationalist movement in a country owned or dominated by a rival. The British were notorious for backing various Arab movements against the rule of the Ottoman Empire with the sole purpose of replacing the Turks as the dominant power in the Middle East. The Japanese did the same in Indochina and throughout the Pacific.



By and large, the narrow nationalist perspective reflects the class outlook of the national bourgeoisie of oppressed countries or the usually very large class of small peasant landholders and urban shopkeepers — the indigenous petty bourgeoisie. Political movements corresponding to the world outlook and limited political objectives of these bourgeois classes have long been a characteristic feature of nationalist movements.

With the triumph of the October Revolution and the establishment of the Third International, however, a new political force — the force of communism — reflecting the world outlook of the proletariat was able to emerge as a material force in the oppressed countries. Despite the fact that the proletariat was a relatively small class in most colonial and semi-colonial countries,\* the communists were nevertheless able to become a leading political force in the national democratic revolution in a number of countries, especially in East Asia. They were able to accomplish this for a number of reasons.

First, small though it was, the proletariat was the only class in these societies whose world outlook enabled it to sustain the struggle for national democracy in a thoroughly consistent and revolutionary fashion. Particularly as the imperialist powers became increasingly adept at trading formal independence and token democratic reform in exchange for the more hidden but still effective controls of the neo-colonialist system, the advantages of promoting narrow nationalist forces to power became more and more apparent.

It is for this reason that revolutionary struggles against

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\*The key political element in communist strategy is the national liberation front which is a broad front *under the leadership of the working class and its political representatives*, embracing forces from a variety of classes whose own class interests are in conflict with imperialist domination. The stable class core of the national liberation front is the united front between the proletariat and the peasantry. Sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie and nascent national bourgeoisie inevitably vacillate in the course of this struggle since the very logic of the national democratic revolution raises the specter of socialism as the only way to guarantee and complete the achievement of national democracy and independence. One of the important political dramas of the revolution thus becomes the struggle of the proletariat to win the allegiance (or the neutrality) of the less reliable class forces.

imperialism increasingly assumed the form of civil wars between communist-led forces representing a proletarian-led worker-peasant alliance and "nationalist" forces (such as Chiang Kai-shek in China) who nominally represented an aspiring national bourgeois class but actually represented the interests of U.S. imperialism.

However, given this historical context, it is not surprising that the communist movement itself should prove not to be immune from the influence of narrow nationalism — especially since the mass base for the national democratic revolutions is to be found among the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie who usually make up the overwhelming majority of the population of oppressed countries. Thus the contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and bourgeois nationalism is not simply one between the communists and other political forces. It is a contradiction which has appeared time and again within communist ranks as well.

In Asia, the most serious expression of this contradiction was Maoism, first in the Communist Party of China. Maoism also penetrated the communist movement in many other countries in Asia — not simply as a Chinese "export," but also because it intersected with similar indigenous tendencies in those movements. In some cases, Maoism seemed to offer a revolutionary alternative to serious weaknesses and errors of the traditional communist parties. In other cases, the structural weakness of the working class in society made it very difficult for communist forces to sustain a Marxist-Leninist perspective.\*

But in addition to the broad historical impulse which gave rise to Maoism, there were historical circumstances specific to

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\*The nationalist deviation in the international communist movement is certainly not confined to parties in the Third World. Nor is it a deviation which inevitably results in "ultra-left" politics as in the case of Pol Pot and China under Mao. For example, a deep-seated nationalist tendency in the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) was largely responsible for the conciliation of the Polish petty bourgeoisie and its main ideological instrument, the Catholic Church — a conciliation which lies at the root of the political crisis which erupted in Poland in 1980. (For more on this point, see "Poland: Where We Stand," in *Line of March* #4, and "Turning Point in Poland," in *Line of March* #10.) Similarly, a nationalist deviation rooted in



Kampuchea which set favorable conditions for a nationalist deviation to develop and consolidate. In particular, the negative consequences of the 1954 Geneva agreement, followed by a period of intense repression of the left under Sihanouk, had severely weakened the Kampuchean communist movement.

It was during this ebb period that a group of young nationalist-minded radicals who in time became the core of the Pol Pot faction returned from France, where they had been university students, and joined the KPRP. With many veteran party leaders killed or in exile in Vietnam and with the party itself at a low point, these young militants — a number of them already imbued with ideas popularized by Mao Zedong and the "anti-revisionist" intellectuals of Paris — enjoyed a meteoric rise in party ranks. In 1960, during the course of a major party regroupment, the figure who seems to have been the driving force behind this group, Saloth Sar (later known as Pol Pot), became a member of the Standing Bureau of the KPRP's central committee. Another, Ieng Sary, became a member of the central committee. In 1963, after the mysterious disappearance of Party Secretary Tou Samouth, one of the veterans of the Kampuchean communist movement, Pol Pot took over leadership of the party, promoting a corps of cadre of similar political and ideological background.

The Australian scholar, David P. Chandler, has succinctly summed up this process as follows:

"Very roughly, what became the Pol Pot faction seized control of a pro-Vietnamese communist party in Phnom Penh in the early 1960s. During its years in power, this faction increasingly stressed an ideology that emphasized self-reliance, nationalism, the primacy of poor peasants and an admiration for Maoist China. The pro-Vietnamese wing of the party, purged in the 1960s and again after 1973, was without a voice during the Pol Pot era. Nearly a thousand members of the pre-1960 Cambodian Communist Party, who had gone into exile at the end of the first Indochina war, were killed at the behest of the Communist Party

the defense of the relatively privileged position of the upper strata of the working class in fully developed capitalist countries underlies Eurocommunism — with its emphasis on "national roads" to socialism and its denial of any universal applicability of revolutionary theory or experience. For a fuller analysis see "The Communist Party of Italy and the Political Degeneration of Eurocommunism," in *Line of March* #11.

of Kampuchea when they returned to Cambodia, ostensibly to work for the revolution in 1971-73. A handful of these figures survive. All of them occupy important positions in Heng Samrin's Vietnamese-supported regime. Ideologically, this wing of the movement has looked for its leadership among the working class and has accepted guidance from Vietnam. Whereas Democratic Kampuchea was engrossed in the idea of fighting a purely *Cambodian* revolution, the current Kampuchean government has been quick to recognize its links with the international communist movement and with the revolutions taking place in Laos and Vietnam."\* (Chandler, 1983-B, pp. 149-50; emphasis in original.)

Even after the seizure of power in 1975, it was impossible for Pol Pot to implement effectively his line of war with Vietnam and a rural barracks socialism until he had physically eliminated almost all the Marxist-Leninist opposition inside the party. Thus, far from being a monolithic party united behind Pol Pot's leadership, the KCP from 1975 through 1978 was in a perpetual state of turmoil. There were at least nine attempts — one of which seems to have temporarily succeeded\*\* — to oust the Pol Pot group from party leadership. In turn, beginning in late 1976, Pol Pot instituted a reign of terror against all of his internal party opponents.

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\*Ben Kiernan argues that there were really *three* tendencies in the KCP: the Pol Pot group, which he describes as "national chauvinist," a group much influenced by China's Cultural Revolution, and the group which has traditionally identified itself with the international communist movement and the close development of the revolution in Indochina as a whole. (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 228.)

\*\*Mystery still surrounds the period from April to October, 1976 when Pol Pot's position in the party appears to have been weakened by a "reorganization" forced on it by the Marxist-Leninist group. Pol Pot apparently was even removed from leadership for a short time. During this period, according to Vickery, "border incidents with Vietnam decreased, fruitful consultations were held, and delegations were exchanged. Cambodia also took a stance similar to Vietnam and contrary to China on recognition of the post-Allende regime in Chile. A conflict over the history of the Cambodian Communist Party — whether it was founded in 1951, and thus in cooperation with Vietnam, or in 1960 and strictly nationalist — was resolved in favor of the former." (Vickery, 1984, p. 150.)

It was during these next two years — mercifully brought to an end by the Vietnamese intervention that culminated in Pol Pot's ouster in January, 1979 — that the bloodiest pages in Kampuchean communist history were written. Hundreds of party leaders of long standing and thousands of party cadre were arrested, tortured and killed. The infamous prison and interrogation center at Tuol Sleng, where the regime carefully recorded the names, photographs and forced confessions of the communist opposition to Pol Pot, was established at this time. Those who were able to do so fled to Vietnam or Laos.

The decisive struggle came in Kampuchea's East Zone which had been the main base of the internal party opposition and where the regional party organization appears to have followed a significantly independent policy. In the main the policies pursued in this region represented the Marxist-Leninist continuity in the KCP. An insight into the devastating result of the defeat of the East Zone opposition is offered by Vickery:

"Until the original Eastern administration was destroyed in 1978, reports generally concur in describing it as a relatively good, or even very good, place to live, both for base peasants and urban evacuees. Starvation seems never to have been a problem, nor was arbitrary terror an ever-present threat as was the case in large areas of the Northwest or North. . . .

"That special pattern in the East came to an abrupt end in mid-1978. The long-simmering policy conflict between the Pol Pot central government and the more moderate, less chauvinistic Eastern Command exploded into open warfare in May. In the subsequent months the defeated East was subject to the most massive purge of the entire DK period. The victims included all East Zone cadres who could be found, then evacuees of 1975, and in particular anyone, including base peasants, believed to be Vietnamese, part-Vietnamese, or pro-Vietnamese. Tens of thousands, perhaps over 100,000, were either killed on the spot or evacuated into the North and Northwest where they were subjected to further bouts of mass murder." (Vickery, 1983, pp. 128-130.)

As the internal party opposition was liquidated, the regime moved quickly to implement its austere social policies which, up until then, it had not been able to put into practice fully. As a result, the mass terror against the population in general reached a new height.

This destruction of the internal party opposition removed a crucial barrier to Pol Pot's policy of escalating the border war against Vietnam. As a result, this was the period in which armed hostilities moved to a qualitatively new stage.

Undoubtedly it was the intersection of these three developments — liquidation of the Marxist-Leninist opposition inside the KCP, the full implementation of Pol Pot's social program inside the country, and the heightened war with Vietnam — that led the surviving Kampuchean Marxist-Leninists to conclude that this situation could not be changed without the forcible ouster of the Pol Pot government.

On December 2, 1978, a National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea (NUFSK) was established by several hundred leading opposition figures meeting in Snuol, Kompong Cham province, in eastern Kampuchea. Its leader was Heng Samrin, formerly a member of the Eastern Region Executive Committee of the KCP and political commissar and commander of the Fourth Division of the revolutionary army.\*

After drawing up a bill of particulars against the Pol Pot regime, accusing it of establishing a system of "neo-slavery

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\*Because none of the leading figures in the NUFSK were well-known at the time, some on the left tended to dismiss the founding of the Salvation Front as a Vietnamese ploy based on individuals who had pretty much "sat out" the war in Hanoi. Vickery, who has researched KCP history carefully, presents a far different picture. The front, he writes,

" . . . did not include any of the first-echelon members of the old party veteran-Pracheachon tendency because they had all been purged. It did include some important second-echelon members, such as Mat Ly, Chea Sim, chief of Damban 20, and Heng Samrin himself. It should also be clear now that they represent party continuity from the earliest Cambodian communist organizations, in that sense are more legitimate than Pol Pot, and that the cooperation with Vietnam is an old tradition to which they are heir. . . . At the original organizational meeting a Front Central Committee of 14 members was chosen. Five of them, including President Heng Samrin, Vice-President Chea Sim, and Hun Sen, were domestic communists who belonged to the East Zone faction but had not gone to Vietnam for training; three others, including Secretary-General Ros Samay, were of the Vietnamese-trained group; and three more were 'new' people with no previous revolutionary or communist experience." (Vickery, 1984, pp. 202-203.)

(that) has nothing to do with socialism" and of having "provoked a border war with Vietnam, thus turning friend into foe," the newly established Front issued a call "to overthrow the dictatorial, militarist and genocidal regime." (*The Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict*, 1979.)

By then, unfortunately, this objective could not be accomplished by the strength of the Kampuchean people alone. A month later, forces of the NUFSK, supported by the political and military muscle of Vietnam, brought the three-year nightmare to an end. Whatever international confusion and vacillation surrounded this event, the overwhelming mass of Kampuchians understood and welcomed it as the dawn of national salvation.

## 4

## The Revolution Rescued

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The tasks facing Kampuchea's communists after the ouster of Pol Pot were staggering. The most fundamental processes of a national economy — along with the basic institutions of civil society — had to be restored. Hundreds of thousands (possibly millions) of people had to be able to return to their homes and reunite with their families. A people standing on the verge of famine had to be supplied with food and the basic means of survival. The people's most fundamental health and sanitation needs had to be met. The political and military victory over Pol Pot had to be secured. The new communist-led government had to establish its political authority with a populace which, while joyful at its liberation, was highly suspicious of those who spoke in the the name of socialism.

In trying to accomplish these aims — without which the new government could not begin to unfold more far-reaching programs for economic development and the transformation of social relations — the Kampuchean communists also faced an armed and highly dangerous counter-revolution and a largely hostile international climate.

### Response to the Ouster of Pol Pot

The forcible ouster of the Pol Pot regime was greeted with predictable outrage by that strange assortment of forces whose one point in common was hostility to the Vietnamese revolution. The U.S., which had gleefully trumpeted news of Pol Pot's genocidal policies, turned around and quickly condemned Vietnam for its role in toppling the regime. The ASEAN coun-

tries, all of whom had deplored the brutalities of the Pol Pot regime, likewise joined in the outcry, with Thailand quickly offering the remnants of the Khmer Rouge sanctuary across the border.

Most enraged was the leadership of the Communist Party of China, who undertook to "teach Vietnam a lesson" by launching what turned out to be an ill-fated invasion of Vietnam along their common border. The CPC's fury was understandable. Despite a number of reports indicating that China's leaders were themselves highly dubious of the wisdom of Pol Pot's social program,\* his anti-Vietnamese regime was a key building block in a broader Chinese plan designed to isolate Vietnam and expand its own anti-Soviet influence throughout Southeast Asia. The loss of Pol Pot might not have been deemed negative in itself so much as the fact that he was replaced with a pro-Vietnamese government prepared to resume the historically close ties between the three revolutions in Indochina and the international communist movement as a whole.

And, as happens so often, echoing these international expressions of anguish and indignation was a section of the U.S. left. The Maoist sects — some of whom had promoted glowing

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\*A number of observers had realized this even prior to the overthrow of Pol Pot. Thus Lowell Finley, co-director of the Southeast Asia Resource Center, wrote in September, 1978:

"The Kampuchean communists have pushed principles often identified with the Chinese revolution to such radical extremes that their domestic policies are reportedly viewed privately by the current, rightward-leaning Chinese leadership as ultra-leftist. The KCP, for its part, labeled Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping 'anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary' when he was still out of power two years ago. Deng is believed to have bluntly told visiting Kampuchean Defense Minister Son Sen in August that Chinese aid would not be able to save his regime unless it abandoned his divisive domestic policies in favor of a broad united front to fight the Vietnamese. Deng and other Chinese leaders believe that the KCP was influenced in the early 1970s by the gang of four which maintained party-to-party relations with the KCP. As a result, the Chinese believe, the KCP adopted a disastrous policy of instant revolution and absolute egalitarianism. According to well-informed Indochina correspondent Nayan Chanda, China is most distressed at the ruthless series of purges and executions which have apparently occurred in Kampuchea." (Finley, 1978-B, p. 23.)

accounts of Pol Pot's "revolutionary socialism" to any who were innocent enough to listen — were predictably furious. Denunciations ranged from the Revolutionary Communist Party's (RCP) relatively restrained (for them), "The Vietnamese revisionists' takeover of Kampuchea was despicable" (*Revolution*, Vol. 4, No. 2-3, p. 2) to wild charges that Vietnamese troops were "slaughtering its [Kampuchea's] citizens" (*The Call*, Feb. 5, 1979) and "systematically pillaging" the country. (Proletarian Unity League [PUL], *Kampuchea*, p. 4.)

The most explicit rendition of Maoism's political and ideological framework was offered by the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) [CP(M-L)] at the time the U.S. Maoist grouping which had been afforded "most-favored" status by Beijing. Declaring that "the invasion of Kampuchea is a part of the Soviet global plan of aggression, counter-revolution and domination," (*The Call*, Jan. 29, 1979) the CP (M-L) called "the defense of Democratic Kampuchea . . . a touchstone of proletarian internationalism." (*Class Struggle*, No. 12, p. 1) What the CP (M-L) meant by "proletarian internationalism" was made a bit clearer in prominently featuring a statement by its sister Maoist party, the Communist Party of Australia (M-L), that "the central issue in world politics is the quarantining and containment of Soviet social imperialism. This is just as important, even more important, than quarantining and containment of Hitler in the 1930s." (*The Call*, March 5, 1979.)

It is worth recalling that these comments were not irrelevant at the time to the process whereby public opinion on the left — and through the left, on broader intellectual currents — was being shaped. The Maoists still had a measure of influence and even some initiative on the left. Most of their organizations were still intact, they had an active propaganda apparatus, and they could still function through a number of broader organizational forms — such as the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association — which were more than hospitable to their version of the events unfolding in Indochina. As a result, they were still able to exercise some measure of influence over the terms of the debate.

But the Maoists were not alone. Much of the left was thoroughly disconcerted, not so much by the ouster of Pol Pot but

by the fact that this had been accomplished largely on the basis of Vietnamese military strength. Many pacifist-oriented groups and individuals who had been active in the movement in opposition to the Vietnam War reacted with dismay and outrage, some of them direly predicting (in phrases that would be widely echoed in the bourgeois press) that Kampuchea would prove to be "Vietnam's Vietnam."

Typifying this widespread sentiment on the "independent" left — and reinforcing it by virtue of its own claims on political "non-alignment" — was the *Guardian*, which carefully calibrated its denunciations of all the principal political forces by "deploring" the actions of the Pol Pot regime, "criticizing" the Vietnamese for intervening, and "condemning" China for attacking Vietnam in retaliation.\* Its analysis was expressed this way:

"In general, it is our view that the principal aspect in Kampuchea is Vietnam's invasion and attempt to replace the government and that all other matters are secondary at this stage, including some questions about the Pol Pot government. . . . The interests of socialism — in the world, the region and the respective Indochinese countries — have not been served by Vietnam's invasion. . . . The invasion of Kampuchea was a grave mistake and must be criticized." (February 28, 1979.)\*\*

The *Guardian* also argued that even if there was some merit to Vietnam's claim that it was being harassed by Pol Pot's armies, the Vietnamese action "cannot be defended politically, whether one chooses to think primarily in global, regional or

\*Typically, the *Guardian* also felt compelled to touch all its bases and "condemn" the Soviet Union, even though it acknowledged that the USSR was "not directly involved."

\*\*Ironically, the *Guardian*, as the foremost "independent" voice on the left, had a golden opportunity to play an extremely positive role at the time since it was then receiving reports from its long-time correspondent Wilfred Burchett which ably documented the precise nature of the conflict. The *Guardian's* refusal to publish Burchett's reports — in some cases they were rewritten to point in a completely contrary political direction — finally led to Burchett's resignation from the paper after 25 years of writing for it.

national terms."\*

However, through all this confusion (much of it intentionally perpetuated) it gradually became clear that the people of Kampuchea took a different view. While Maoists were deriding the NUFSK as a Vietnamese "fifth column" designed to aid in the subjugation and colonization of Kampuchea, Western intelligence reports were acknowledging that "surprisingly the Front seems to be getting popular support" inside Kampuchea (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, Dec. 22, 1978) and that "in some areas of Cambodia the local population has been helping the PRK and Vietnamese troops flush out Khmer Rouge cadres and unearth arms caches." (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, Jan. 26, 1979.) And while Pol Pot was claiming that the Khmer Rouge army, supported by an armed populace, would repel an armed attack from Vietnam, these boasts were quickly proved hollow by his refusal — clearly judicious — to arm the peasant population to fight the Vietnamese and their NUFSK allies. By then the KCP leadership could have little doubt that an armed populace would be much more likely to turn its guns against them than against the Vietnamese.

As David Chandler notes:

"The popularity of the (Pol Pot) regime was never high. . . . Despite its public statements, the regime distrusted the people whom it governed. When faced with a life and death struggle against Vietnam, for example, the party leaders were unwilling to arm the population and refused to stand and fight. . . . The invading Vietnamese themselves and the Cambodians

\*The position taken by many who were then in the process of breaking away from Maoism — the "anti-revisionist, anti-left opportunist" trend — was not much different. The now defunct Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), which at that time was the leading force in this developing anti-Maoist trend, commented:

"The character of the domestic policies pursued by the Kampuchean government has no bearing on the legitimacy of Vietnam's actions. If, as seems likely, the Pol Pot regime was guilty of excesses and pursued a generally ultra-left line in its efforts at national reconstruction, then this is a matter for the Kampuchean people to decide and correct. . . . If Vietnamese sovereignty was genuinely threatened by the Pol Pot regime, then Vietnam should have presented its case to the court of international opinion." (*The Organizer*, Feb., 1979.)

who accompanied them faced hardly any popular resistance. Indeed, the evidence suggests that nearly everyone in Cambodia regarded the Vietnamese as having saved them from the horrors of the Pol Pot regime." (Chandler, 1983-B, p. 150.)

These assessments have been confirmed by virtually every objective observer who visited Kampuchea. Such an unlikely figure as former U.S. ambassador to Kampuchea, Emory Swank, for instance, reported:

"... the Khmer Rouge dissidents' overthrow of Pol Pot in January, 1979 has saved this country from a conjunction of fanaticism and genocide which otherwise would have destroyed this country. ... The Khmers regard the continued presence of Vietnamese forces on their territory as a guarantee against the presence of Pol Pot. ... It should be noted that the Vietnamese presence is neither flagrant nor of an oppressive nature." (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 17, 1983.)

Similar views were expressed by a remarkable variety of sources including a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*:

"The picture that emerges from a 9-day visit to Phnom Penh and seven of the country's provinces, and from generally free talks with residents [is this]. ... Most Cambodians interviewed ... say they would rather have a Vietnamese occupation than a resurgence of the communist-led Khmer Rouge regime, which presided over the extermination of as many as 3 million of the country's 7 million inhabitants between 1975 and 1979. ... One of the major reasons for that attitude undoubtedly has been the mildness of the Vietnamese military occupation." (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 2, 1980.)

My own experience in September, 1984, was similar. Casual conversations struck up in chance encounters would quickly become highly charged emotional outbursts as people were asked about what happened to them during the Pol Pot years. The words "January 7, 1979" — the date Vietnamese troops took Phnom Penh — have become an image in the language, the principal departure point for marking historical time, characterized as "before liberation" and "after liberation."

In time, the political realities of Kampuchea began to penetrate and reshape the debate on the left. Reflecting this shift, the *Guardian* in 1983 offered a public "reappraisal" of its position on Kampuchea, declaring:

"Since that time (1979), a great deal of information has become available about the criminal nature of the 'socialism' practiced by the Pol Pot regime and the extent of its provocative actions and intransigence prior to the Vietnamese invasion. Moreover, international conditions have changed: U.S. imperialism and its Southeast Asian proxies have joined with China in providing support for the anti-Vietnamese Kampuchean factions. ... The Democratic Kampuchea Coalition, which includes rightists and discredited ultra-leftists' allied with imperialism, is a potential vehicle for returning Kampuchea to imperialist domination."\* (*Guardian*, January 5, 1983.)

The Maoists, on the other hand, could never work their way out of the political cul-de-sac in which they found themselves. Their dilemma was that the implacable logic of their underlying ideological foundation — Mao's "Theory of the Three Worlds" with its view of the Soviet Union as a "restored" capitalist society hell-bent on world domination — was pushing them down an opportunist path from which there could be no return. Over the next several years, the Maoist groups would vie with each other in their attacks on the Soviet Union, Cuba and Vietnam, the most consistent of them going so far as to criticize those "appeasement" elements in the U.S. ruling class which took a position anywhere to the left of Ronald Reagan on how the U.S. ought to fashion its policy toward blocking the devious designs of the Soviet Union. In the end, this burden became untenable.\*\* What remains of Maoism in the U.S. has

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\*Predictably, after concluding that "Vietnamese occupation is preferable to control by the DK coalition and its allies," the *Guardian* went on to warn against the dangers of the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea, going so far as to declare that "The Kampuchean people may eventually have to struggle against their stronger neighbor's tendency to dominate their affairs." Still, belated though it was and despite its gratuitous warning to the Kampucheans, the *Guardian's* reversal was a welcome and significant development on the U.S. left.

\*\*The events of 1979 further accelerated the conspicuous collapse of most of the Maoist trend. The RCP had already been rent by a bitter factional split with roughly half the organization forming the short-lived Revolutionary Workers Headquarters. Although the RCP itself still exists today, it is little more than a semi-adventurist "new wave" cult waiting for Mao and the Gang of Four to be vindicated. The PUL barely survives as a small circle whose main activity consists of publishing diatribes against the

remained consistently hostile to Vietnam and the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

### Kampuchea: The Challenge to Consolidate the Victory

Despite overwhelming popular support for the ouster of Pol Pot, the tasks facing Kampuchea's communists were formidable. Their ranks decimated by Pol Pot's reign of terror, they had to re-establish their authority before a population which associated communists with mass murder, economic deprivation and arbitrary (and unscientific) forced social reorganization. The bulk of available cadre were relatively inexperienced and under-developed politically. And for some period of time they could not help but be dependent on Vietnamese military protection, economic aid and political guidance.

Ultimately, however, the rescue of the Kampuchean revolution would depend on the communists' ability to solve four broad social tasks: 1) the revival of civil society in a country whose internal economic infrastructure had become non-functional and where even the most elementary norms of public life had all but disappeared; 2) containment, suppression and defeat of a counter-revolutionary effort which, while

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Soviet Union and the ultra-leftism of its Maoist confreres. The Communist Workers Party (CWP) has scrambled wildly to adjust to the collapse of Maoism, veering sharply from its earlier infantile leftism to a rightward swing and an ideological eclecticism which almost defies categorization; in 1985 it changed its name to become the New Democratic Movement. Most striking, however, was the disintegration of the CP(M-L) which, for a brief period, seemed to have been accorded "official" status as the most-favored of the U.S. Maoist groups by the Communist Party of China. Of all the Maoist groups, the CP(M-L) was the most vocal in its denunciations of Vietnam and its support for the Pol Pot regime. Dan Burstein, editor of the CP(M-L) newspaper, *The Call*, was the only U.S. left journalist to have visited Kampuchea during the Pol Pot years, and his glowing reports of life in the DK were promoted throughout the Maoist trend to demonstrate the "success" of Maoism in Indochina. Several years later, Burstein ruefully acknowledged that he had been taken in by the Khmer Rouge and that his visit to Kampuchea had been stage-managed. The one relatively unscathed survivor of the Maoist debacle is the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS) which continues to dutifully promote the Beijing view of the situation in Kampuchea while scrambling to play down its overall allegiance to Maoism as much as possible.

shorn of its social base in the country, had suddenly become the focus of substantial international support from a broad and diverse group of forces; 3) putting into place the social and economic institutions which would lay the foundations for a future socialist society; and 4) restoring, extending and consolidating the unity of the three Indochinese countries.

The challenge was massive, and the progress has been equally substantial.

### Revival of Civil Society

The scope of this task can only be understood in light of the enormity of the devastation which constituted Pol Pot's legacy to the Kampuchean people — a reality which will stand, perhaps, as grim testimony to the ruinous capacities of ultra-leftism in power. Perhaps those in the best position to describe Kampuchea in the days immediately following liberation were the Vietnamese. Fanning out over the entire countryside, Vietnamese military and political authorities were able to see the devastation as a whole; and even these battle-hardened veterans who had withstood the devastation of U.S. bombings, terror and defoliation for decades in their own country were shocked at what they encountered in Kampuchea. It is in that light that the following summary account should be read:

"At the birth of the People's Republic of Kampuchea even the most optimistic observers had no idea how the new regime was going to restore life back to normal on the immense ruins of a whole society, which included the ruins of all communities and all families. . . . The Pol Pot-Ieng Sary-Khieu Samphan gang had also . . . destroyed the structure of the national economy, wrecked the national culture together with the education and health-care systems, and provoked a dislocation of the social fabric making all human existence impossible. All the survivors were bags of bones waiting for death: famine and epidemics threatened their fragile lives. From their places of exile, they trekked back to their native villages looking for their families, shuffling their dropsy-swollen feet on unending roads.

"The history of the People's Republic of Kampuchea opened with that huge population movement which involved all those who had survived genocide. The homeland of Angkor was like an anthill crushed under cruel boots: people were dazed and



confused and wondered what the future held in store for them. Half a year would pass before some order was restored. But only in the countryside, thanks to the generosity of tropical nature. Things were different in the towns and cities: urban life calls for a minimum of conveniences, yet there was no electricity, no water, no food reserves, no household utensils, none of the current objects needed by families and individuals. Another big headache for the administrators was the fact that no one had any identification papers while Khmer Rouge elements were seeking to worm their way in among the people, often with long-term wicked designs. To put people back into the towns was a complicated endeavor which could not be hastily done.

"While on their way back to their native places, many people fell from hunger and exhaustion. Famine, which had grown ever more serious in Khmer Rouge times, took on disastrous proportions in the very first weeks of the new regime, after the scanty paddy stores had been distributed to the people. According to documents kept at the Phnom Penh Revolutionary People's Tribunal, in some of the last Khmer Rouge bases close to the border with Thailand Pol Pot soldiers had turned cannibal. What happened in most cases was that people fed on whatever they could lay their hands on: wild roots and tubers, crabs and snails, snakes, rodents, insects . . . while setting about growing a new crop of rice. Kampuchean rivers teem with fish; yet little could be done to turn this to account for the Khmer Rouge had exterminated nearly all the fisherfolk — most of them being members of the Cham or Viet communities — and destroyed boats and fishing gear. Hunger was to last until September, 1980, i.e., for nearly two years, although international assistance was a great help in alleviating immediate hardships. Only in early, or in some instances, late 1981 could the scourge of famine be considered as having been warded off in the various regions thanks to the harvest of rice and other food crops.

"Physical exhaustion following many years of hard labour, malnutrition and the hard living conditions of the post-liberation period led to terrible epidemic outbursts. No village was immune from dysentery and diarrhea; diseases related to deficient food hygiene were inevitable as people tried to keep body and soul together by eating whatever edible substances were at hand; . . .

"Malaria, which had been endemic over four-fifths of the territory, broke out in epidemics which threatened the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. The tuberculosis morbidity

rate rose higher than ever and a form of galloping phthisis, particularly dangerous for the Kampuchians, caused fairly important damage. The whole of the health-care network which had been built under the former regimes had been wrecked by the Khmer Rouge. . . .

"Prospects were not any brighter in other fields. All means of road and river transport had been destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, and so the only way to travel now was on foot and loads were moved about on the heads of porters. Market-places took shape in a spontaneous way but as money had been abolished by the Khmer Rouge paddy had to be used as a means of exchange. People lived in makeshift huts bare of all furniture and had neither sleeping mats, cooking pots, eating bowls, nor drinking cups. Most were clothed in ill-smelling rags crawling with lice. In this latter part of the 20th century, the people of Kampuchea lived such a primitive life and thought themselves lucky, for it was as though they had returned from the underworld. The darkest spot remained the threat of a Khmer Rouge comeback: in the first year of the people's regime, local administrations were constantly subjected to Khmer Rouge penetration and attack and the populations lived in fear of their possible return." (*The People's Republic of Kampuchea at the Threshold of Its Sixth Year*, 1983, pp. 12-16.)

The first step of the new government was to put an immediate end to the Khmer Rouge's hated population relocation policy. "Citizens are authorized to return to live with their families, to go to their former places of origin or to choose their residence as they wish," stated the first pronouncement of the NUFSK. The one exception concerned those who wanted to return to the cities, a request which the authorities promised would be "resolved suitably when the general conditions of the country permit it." \* (From a document transmitted by Saporamean Kampuchea News Agency of the NUFSK.)

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\*Although large numbers of the displaced population came from the cities, most were still of rural origin. Three-fourths of Phnom Penh's pre-1975 population of two-and-a-half million, for instance, consisted of people who had fled to the city while the U.S. was devastating the surrounding countryside. While these people could not return to Phnom Penh which was then completely lacking in such elementary facilities as electric power, a water supply and sewage disposal, they could return to the rural areas they had previously inhabited, reclaim their land and reunite with surviving family members.

At the same time, "divisions of the population into three categories" was abolished and "all coercive administrative apparatus and organisms of the secret police" replaced with locally elected Popular Committees for Self-Management. Schooling for children up to the age of ten was immediately re-established, restoration of pagodas begun, and freedom to practice religious beliefs once again guaranteed. A broad amnesty policy for those who had served in former regimes including the Khmer Rouge regime — was announced. (*ibid.*)

Over the next four years the revival of Kampuchean economic life proceeded at a spectacular pace. The country's gross national product (GNP) — not including agricultural production directly consumed by each peasant family — rose an incredible 431%! (Of course, the base GNP level in 1979 was so low that this remarkable rise merely brought the country back to its pre-Pol Pot level. The total, however, was shared much more equitably than in earlier times.) By 1983 production of rice had been restored to the point where self-sufficiency was in sight. Cattle had increased in number from 100,000 in 1979 to 1,692,000 in 1983; swine from 42,700 to 827,300; poultry from 822,000 to 4,654,200. The fresh water fish catch went from 19,500 tons in 1979 to 74,000 tons in 1983, while the maritimetime (salt water) catch rose from 500 tons to 4,000 tons. (Figures from Ministry of Economic Planning.)

During its first year, the PRK government rebuilt power stations and restored the urban water supply, re-established a communications network (principally radio and telegraph) and began the systematic reopening of industrial enterprises. These latter were principally in the area of agricultural machinery, chemicals and consumer products — textiles, glass, kitchen utensils, tobacco, etc. Production of industrial crops — rubber, fibers, jute, tobacco, sugar, coconut oil, fruits and coffee — rose dramatically. With Soviet assistance, unused and dismantled machinery was put back into use and a small spare-parts industry has now emerged in Kampuchea itself. All told, over 60 industrial enterprises are functioning once again in Kampuchea today.

In March, 1980 a national currency was restored, facilitating the revival of trade and commerce. Central markets were reopened in all the major cities and throughout the rural

areas.\* The cities were gradually repopulated. Transport is gradually being restored. Bicycles, pedicabs, mopeds, motorbikes, ox-drawn carts and a few automobiles clog the streets of Phnom Penh. Two railroad lines operate and minimal plane service to distant reaches of the country operates out of Phnom Penh. The highways remain in generally poor condition, however, making most trips outside Phnom Penh lengthy, time-consuming and at times uncertain undertakings.

Politically, a popularly elected national assembly has functioned since 1981. Its members include non-communists as well as members of the reconstituted KPRP — although it is clear that political leadership is firmly in KPRP hands. Equally important are the mass organizations — principally trade unions, peasants, women and youth — through which a vast number of Kampucheans are now playing a more or less active role in the organization of social life and in the broad political and ideological process shaping the revival and development of the Kampuchean nation.

One of the most impressive gains since 1979 has been the restoration of a national health system. The general conditions of wartime Kampuchea (1970-75) had already wreaked havoc on the country's health network. U.S. bombing had destroyed many hospitals and clinics while many doctors fled the country for France and other places where their careers could fare better. This already bad situation was aggravated by the policies of the Pol Pot regime, so that by 1979 only a handful of trained medical personnel remained in the country, most hospitals were shut down and the medical school was shut completely.

By the end of 1981, the PRK's new Ministry of Health had

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\*Phnom Penh boasts four huge markets, organized on the basis of privately owned and managed stall spaces. Merchants selling similar products — produce, textiles, books, utensils, liquors, etc. — are grouped, making prices competitive. Kampuchean currency is used exclusively, although for the time being the currency black market operates in almost open fashion. There is a wide selection of imported products, virtually all of which are "smuggled" in from Thailand. The smuggling is openly tolerated, if not encouraged, by the authorities in order to make a wider array of goods accessible without the government itself having to expend hard currency.

supervised the establishment of seven centrally organized hospitals in Phnom Penh, hospitals in each province, 125 district hospitals and local health stations in 90% of Kampuchea's 1,286 villages. The Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, the country's main school for the training of doctors, and the Central Nursing School were both reopened in 1979. Three pharmaceutical factories and a central pharmaceutical depot were also reopened in 1979. (*Medico-Sanitary Achievements 1979-1981*, pp. 16-17.)

By mid-1984, the Medical Faculty had graduated 216 new doctors, 170 pharmacists and 70 dentists, with a current enrollment of 1,150 students. The bulk of the new graduates have been assigned to hospitals in the provinces, while six percent have been sent abroad for advanced study — mostly to the Soviet Union. All medical treatment, including hospitalization, is free of charge. (Source: Tep Tho, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Pharmacy and Dentistry, interviewed in Phnom Penh Sept. 12, 1984.)

Comparable advances have been registered in the realms of education, culture and sports. Gone are the days when the country's "communists" would state: "The true university is found in the rice fields, the worksites, the factories. The essential is neither knowledge, nor diplomas, nor science, nor technique, but proletarian-consciousness, that of the poor, working-peasants fighting for the ideas of the Party. On the basis of consciousness one can do everything, acquire everything, succeed in everything"; (Burchett, 1981, p. 106) or when a KCP resolution could declare, "In Democratic Kampuchea, sports and physical culture are useless activities to be permanently wiped out. Our sport is digging the soil." (Thanh Tin, 1979, p. 29.)

The sum total of this revival has been so remarkable and so unmistakable that even a generally hostile Western press has been given to unusual superlatives in describing it. A February, 1981 report in the *Christian Science Monitor*, for instance, under the headline "Cambodia's Surprising Recovery," states:

"Full recovery' is an assessment to be given only cautiously in a land that only 15 months ago seemed on the brink of extinction. But any return visitor to Cambodia today will see remarkable evidence of health in happy contrast to conditions

a year ago. When I visited Cambodia only three months after Vietnamese troops ousted the radical Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot, Cambodian civilians walked about the countryside, dazed, in a state of shock, searching for loved ones and uncertain if they would have enough to eat tomorrow. . . .

"A visit now reveals Cambodians living better and eating better than at any other time since 1975. And for those Cambodians I talked to who suffered the dislocations caused by American bombings and five years of civil war in the early 1970s, life seemed better than at any time since Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in March, 1970. The unpleasant fact for critics of the puppet regime established by Vietnam is that the nation is doing surprisingly well under the government headed by former battalion commander Heng Samrin." (February 27, 1981.)

A similar report, under the heading "Born-Again Nation," appears in an even less likely place, the *Wall Street Journal*:

"Small boats nose against the strong current of the Mekong River in the early morning light, trapping huge, flapping fish in bamboo nets. Ashore, the markets come alive in a babble of hawkers, shoppers and animals. The streets of the capital swarm with trucks, vans, automobiles, motorbikes, bicycles and bell-ringing ox and pony carts. With local variations, the scene is repeated daily in other cities and towns. In rural areas, a substantial rice crop, now being harvested, has turned much of the country into a sea of green and gold. After a decade of war, upheaval and famine, the emergency seems to be over in Cambodia. 'You can take it off the critical list,' says one source here. 'It will survive.'

"A two-week visit provides plenty of evidence to support that assessment. Most people seem to have enough to eat and their health is improving. Reflecting the return to something approaching normalcy, a baby boom of sorts is in progress. . . . Although elements of the Khmer Rouge fight on and the Hanoi-installed Heng Samrin regime still isn't recognized by the United Nations, the turnaround within the country since then has been dramatic. 'It's the difference between night and day,' says one visitor who was last here only eight months ago.

"Bustling Phnom Penh has hundreds of food and drink stalls, dozens of restaurants, bakeries, hair-dressing salons and television-repair shops, and many other enterprises. A foreign visitor puts the transformation into some perspective. 'A year ago you looked at a cyclist or an ox-cart because they were

rarities,' he says. 'Today you have to look not to be run over by them.'" (February 5, 1981.)

Two years later, in 1983, former U.S. ambassador to Kampuchea, Emory Swank, added to the picture:

"Practically starting from scratch, Cambodia has made an astonishing and remarkable recovery. Production of rice has increased to a point at which self-sufficiency may be attained after two or three years. Industry is slowly being restored. Hospitals have reopened and medical care, though still inadequate, has improved. Cambodia's cultural institutions, including Buddhist temples, the Institute of Fine Arts and Music, the Corps de Ballet, the Royal Palace Museum and the Museum of Antiquities, are open again. Phnom Penh, where fewer than 100 people remained when the Vietnamese marched in,\* today has a population of 500,000. And the country's population has regained the pre-Pol Pot level of 7 million.

"This rebirth of the country stands as testimony to the resilience of the people. It also says something about the effectiveness of Vietnamese and PRK governance: recovery would not have occurred as rapidly as it has under oppressive, insensitive rule." (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 17, 1983.)

### Suppression of the Counter-Revolution

Although the military and political ouster of Pol Pot was accomplished with relative ease, the task of suppressing the ongoing Pol Pot-led counter-revolution remains high on the agenda of the PRK. Even without popular support, small bands of armed guerrillas, with lots of international backing, are in a position to conduct hit-and-run raids and organize economic sabotage. The consequences of this activity on Kampuchea's fragile economic infrastructure — especially during the first two years of the PRK's existence — were quite costly. But in time this aspect of the counter-revolution has receded as lack of popular support internal to the country and isolation of

\*Under Pol Pot, the population of Phnom Penh numbered somewhere between 20-30,000 people, the essential DK administrative apparatus. Virtually all of these fled with Pol Pot in January 1979. The Vietnamese report finding only 70 people in Phnom Penh when they entered the city.

the terrorists made their position deep inside Kampuchea less and less viable.

If there was little basis for sustaining a counter-revolutionary effort inside Kampuchea, however, there was a substantial base for such an enterprise outside the country — principally in the policy considerations motivating China, the U.S. and the ASEAN countries, as well as in the Kampuchean exile community at whose political center were the principal beneficiaries of all the former regimes. But the Kampuchean counter-revolution faced a profound political embarrassment. Its political and military core was the Pol Pot regime whose discredit internationally was matched only by its lack of a social base inside the country. Those who only shortly before had loudly condemned the Khmer Rouge as the quintessence of "communist" tyranny now found themselves defending the Pol Pot government as the only "legal" entity entitled to rule Kampuchea. At the same time, what was left of the Khmer Rouge army — and Pol Pot was able to keep a sizeable military force of perhaps 50,000 troops intact in 1979-80 — was the only viable military force capable of mounting significant counter-revolutionary operations against the new Kampuchean government.

Sensing the political opportunities inherent in this dilemma, a former Kampuchean prime minister, Son Sann, set about to try to fill the vacuum by quickly organizing a Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), most of whose members were drawn from the ranks of one-time officers of the Lon Nol army. Not to be outdone, former Prince Sihanouk recruited a small band of loyalists to create the appearance of yet another non-communist "resistance force." (It is safe to assume that both Son Sann and Sihanouk were "encouraged" in these undertakings by various international patrons.)

The appearance of these new formations highlighted the underlying dilemma of the counter-revolution. Both Sihanouk and Son Sann needed Pol Pot's legal status and armed force. At the same time, the Khmer Rouge, because of its well deserved reputation as organizers and proprietors of one of history's most brutal regimes, had little chance by itself of international support without an infusion of cleansing agents — which, it was hoped, Sihanouk and Son Sann would provide.

Attempting to clean up its own image (and exposing clearly

how tenuous its hold on Marxism-Leninism ever was in the first place) the KCP Central Committee announced in December, 1981 that the party had been "dissolved" and that the DK intended to "adopt the democratic system of government and will not construct socialism or communism." (Vickery, 1984, p. 251.) Aware of the fact that this pronouncement would probably be viewed dubiously in the West, Pol Pot declared, in a rare interview with a French journalist in April, 1982: "People must believe us. We are sincere. Nothing remains of the communist system among us. The Party has been dissolved and its principles abandoned. We have restored religious beliefs, private property and individual freedoms." (Chandler, 1983-B, p. 152) Other Khmer Rouge leaders have echoed similar themes. Thus Ieng Sary noted, during a trip abroad, that he was happy with Reagan's election in 1980 (Vickery, 1984, p. 251) and Khieu Samphan told the press that the Khmer Rouge was now "on the side of the West." (*New York Times*, July 9, 1982.)

The point of all these maneuvers became evident when, in June, 1982, the three groups announced the formation of a new DK "coalition government" with Sihanouk as "President," Son Sann as "Prime Minister" and Khieu Samphan as "Vice-President." The purpose of this coalition is to utilize the legal standing of the DK regime — including its U.N. seat and the confusing fact that a few socialist countries continue to maintain diplomatic relations with it\* — to permit the U.S. and ASEAN countries to aid the "non-communist" section of the coalition. However, while imperialist ideologues have fastidiously focused on the "anticommunist elements" in the coalition, the inescapable fact is that *all* aid to any faction of the Kampuchean "contras" principally benefits the Pol Pot forces. High level U.S. policy-makers know this, even though it is not

\*China, whose motives are the clearest, provides almost all of its military aid to the Khmer Rouge and is the key player in this unsavory melodrama. But the continuation of the DK's formal existence also enables Romania, Yugoslavia and North Korea — all of whom continue to recognize Pol Pot's regime — to hide behind legalisms in an effort to placate China and to register their opposition to "outside" intervention in the affairs of one socialist country by another, *regardless of the political merits of the matter.*

convenient to say so, since they have already consigned a "liberated" Kampuchea to China's sphere of influence — an arrangement which could only be administered through Beijing's clients in the "resistance movement."

Meanwhile, Pol Pot's supporters on the left have tried to legitimize this coalition of strange political bedfellows by suggesting that the horrors of the Pol Pot years have been exaggerated and that, in fact, the Khmer Rouge was well on its way to correcting its own errors and "excesses" prior to the Vietnamese intervention. The League of Revolutionary Struggle, for instance, claims that "there were indications in 1978 that the Kampuchean government was beginning to correct some of its errors." (*Unity*, Jan. 25, 1985.) The only other people who seem to have noticed these "indications," however, are those who run the CIA's propaganda network. According to Michael Vickery, they, too, spotted these "improvements" in Kampuchea sometime in mid-1977 when they realized that hostility to Vietnam was a central and permanent (and potentially suicidal) component of DK foreign policy. Focusing on charges of human destruction in 1975 and 1976, Vickery notes that a 1979 CIA report "ignores, even whitewashes the murderous events of 1977-78, in particular the latter year, in which there were possibly more executions than during all the rest of the DK period. . . . Democratic Kampuchea, however brutal its methods and disastrous its policies, is shown achieving steady progress interrupted only by the Vietnamese invasion and the change of regime." (For full elaboration of this thesis, see Vickery, 1982.)

After the Pol Pot regime was successfully replaced by what was widely perceived as a "pro-Vietnamese regime," the shift in emphasis by the U.S. became fairly obvious. *Washington Post* reporter Elizabeth Becker declares flatly that after the ouster of the Pol Pot regime,

"the Carter administration decided to give its tacit support to the rearming and regrouping of the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot. They saw no future for the KPNLF. The Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, were proven military leaders, fighters who could go head to head with the Vietnamese. . . . The Reagan administration continued the Carter policy although it has given greater political support to the KPNLF. . . . It was under the Reagan administration that China, the U.S. and ASEAN

put irresistible pressure on Son Sann to join in a coalition with Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge." (*Washington Post*, Jan. 28, 1985.)

Similar pressure was exerted on Sihanouk, who asserts that J. Stapleton Roy, the U.S. charge d'affaires in Beijing, told him early in 1981: "If you form a united front with the Khmer Rouge, it will be easier for friendly countries to help you." (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, Aug. 14, 1981.) The ASEAN countries were even more explicit, according to Sihanouk:

"ASEAN told Son Sann and his followers, told Sihanouk and his followers, please enter the legal state framework of Democratic Kampuchea so that we can help you. Then we help not rebels, but a legal state recognized by the United Nations. . . . If Son Sann and Sihanouk refrained from entering the legal framework of the state of DK, the Khmer Rouge left alone would finally lose the seat of Kampuchea. That would be the first step toward recognition of the Heng Samrin regime by the international community represented by the U.N." (Sihanouk, 1985.)

In order to make the efforts of the counter-revolution seem viable, its backers have promoted a picture of present-day Kampuchea in which guerrilla fighters operate freely and on a large scale in a country anxiously awaiting its real "liberation" from a brutal Vietnamese occupation. Tales of the Vietnamese language being forced on the country and Vietnamese colonizers taking over large land areas have become the stock-in-trade of a small army of right-wing propagandists with ready access to the public print.

Once again such comments are dutifully echoed on the left by the Maoists. The LRS, for example, has created a fantasy world in which "the Kampuchean resistance is growing in strength . . . [and] an estimated one to two million Kampuchians live in zones under guerrilla control." In this never-never land, rebel "forces are engaging the Vietnamese occupying army in fierce battles not only in the border area, but also in the heart of Kampuchea along routes 5 and 6." In the LRS scenario, Kampuchea writhes under a brutal Vietnamese occupation, desperately short of food, and victim of "a policy of settler colonization . . . with an estimated 500,000 Vietnamese moving into Kampuchea." (*Unity*, Jan. 25, 1985.)

But despite all such wishful thinking, the counter-revolution in Kampuchea is qualitatively failing. As almost every Western visitor to Kampuchea in the past five years has noted, the simple fact of the matter is that the counter-revolutionary forces have no viable social base in Kampuchea today. Even in 1981, a *Christian Science Monitor* reporter, taking note of the developing attempts to unite the disparate counter-revolutionary forces, reported that the idea of "a resistance coalition with the ousted Khmer Rouge . . . raises more fear than hope among the Cambodians I talked to. As Cambodia gets on its feet, the prospect of the return of the Khmer Rouge is simply chilling. There can be little support for resistance aimed at ending the Vietnamese occupation." (Jim Laurie, *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 27, 1981.) Four years later this conclusion was echoed by a *Newsweek* team who reported, "almost everyone in Cambodia sees the Vietnamese as insurance against a return of Pol Pot." (*Newsweek*, April 8, 1985.)

Contrary to the counter-revolutionary propaganda, the Vietnamese maintain a very low profile in Kampuchea (the bulk of Vietnamese forces are stationed along the Thai border) and have genuinely aided the country in its climb back from chaos at considerable sacrifice to themselves.

Concerning the charge that the Vietnamese language is being forced on the populace, the *Wall Street Journal* notes:

"Anti-Phnom Penh propaganda has it that the Vietnamese-installed Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh is forcing Cambodians to learn Vietnamese. Cambodian resistance groups claim that all civil servants and school children must learn the alien language. But international aid officials, who have frequent contact with Cambodian civil servants and schools, say it isn't so. Children aren't taught any foreign languages in their first ten years at school, they say. At higher levels, such as Phnom Penh University's medical faculty, 70% of instruction is in Khmer, the language of Cambodia, and the rest in French, staff say." (*Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 4, 1984.)\*

As to charges of a Vietnamese takeover of Kampuchea, the

\*The biggest language problem in Kampuchea today is the unavailability of needed scholarly texts in almost every field in the Khmer language. And so long as Kampuchea continues to import most of its machinery, its



Australian journalist, David Jenkins, writing for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, reports after a trip to the country:

"The more strident claims of those associated with the anti-Heng Samrin Democratic Kampuchea coalition notwithstanding, few observers in Phnom Penh believe there is any systematic Hanoi-inspired plan for the Vietnamization of Cambodia. Before the 1970-75 war, there were some 400-500,000 Vietnamese in the country, working as shopkeepers and artisans in the main towns and living in fishing communities around the Great Lake, northwest of the capital. In 1970, however, an anti-Vietnamese campaign of exceptional brutality drove most Vietnamese across the border into South Vietnam.\* Most of the Vietnamese in Cambodia today, it seems, are former residents who have been drifting back since 1979. . . . There seems little to support the September, 1983 claim of U.S. State Department official John Monjo that there is 'officially sponsored Vietnamese immigration,' though Monjo may be right when he said that 150-200,000 Vietnamese had moved into Cambodia." (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, Nov. 29, 1984, p. 30.)

One may say, in fact, that the Vietnamese "occupation" of Kampuchea has proven a grave disappointment to the counter-revolutionary coalition and their propagandists who were counting on a mass upsurge of anti-Vietnamese sentiment — which the kind of harsh measures they describe undoubtedly would have fueled — in order to develop a social base for themselves to return to power. Instead, the Vietnamese have turned over authority to the Kampucheans themselves in every area of life as quickly as people could be trained to their tasks. This has been true in the military realm as well where, increasingly, Kampuchean troops have been playing a more prominent role

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work force will have to learn the appropriate languages — English, French, Russian, German, Japanese — in which instruction manuals will invariably be written.

\*Most commentators, in speaking of the Vietnamese who were resident in Kampuchea prior to 1970, make no distinction between relatively recent arrivals and Kampucheans of Vietnamese descent. In fact, many of the "Vietnamese" expelled by Lon Nol — as well as those who fled in the face of Pol Pot repression — were long settled families in Kampuchea who had come from Vietnam generations earlier beginning in the nineteenth century.

in the suppression of the counter-revolutionary armed forces, even in the Thai border areas.

At the same time, the inherent tensions and weaknesses of the forces making up the counter-revolutionary coalition "government" are becoming more and more evident. The three factions continue to retain separate armed forces which frequently engage each other in skirmishes. And their tenuous hold on any Kampuchean "territory" — the separately administered refugee camps along the Thai border — was qualitatively brought to an end in the 1984-85 dry season offensive by PRK and Vietnamese troops.

In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that the "coalition government" is completely the creature of its international patrons. Despite frequent pledges of support to the "non-communist" section of the counter-revolution, the U.S. has been forced to adopt a soft line toward the Khmer Rouge ever since its struggle against Vietnam became the principal defining feature of its policies.

Much to the dismay of many of the coalition's international sponsors, the Khmer Rouge remains the dominant military/political force in the enterprise, its strength deriving not from any remnant popular support inside Kampuchea but from massive Chinese aid which has enabled Pol Pot to hold a sizeable army together. But even the Pol Pot forces are on the decline. Starting in 1979 with an estimated 50,000 troops, Pol Pot now commands fewer than 35,000. And there would seem to be little basis for this trend to be reversed. Battle losses, age, a deteriorating military and political situation, and the PRK's amnesty policy — which has been especially directed toward Khmer Rouge soldiers and cadre — have all taken their toll.

If the Khmer Rouge is an embarrassment to Washington and ASEAN, Sihanouk is mere window-dressing, his presence in the coalition designed to give it a cover of historical continuity. But the mercurial prince, whose meager forces spend most of their time defending themselves from the attacks of their allies, can hardly be taken seriously as a political force any longer. Sihanouk's political cul-de-sac is laced with irony. Few political figures have less reason to accommodate themselves to Pol Pot. It was Pol Pot's decision to launch the armed struggle against Sihanouk that set the conditions for the 1970 coup which drove



the prince out of the country. And again when Sihanouk agreed to front for the Khmer Rouge when it took power in 1975, he was held under virtual house arrest while a sizeable portion of his family were among those killed by the regime. Nevertheless, Sihanouk once again finds himself the fall guy for Pol Pot, in which role he resembles nothing so much as a modern-day Lear, shorn of position, power and vision, inexorably stumbling into historical oblivion.

That leaves Son Sann and the KPNLF as the "last, best hope" — at least for U.S. policy-makers and for a wide assortment of journalists and Southeast Asia experts who would like to see the Kampuchean revolution derailed once again but have no stomach for Pol Pot and no confidence in the increasingly comic prince.

Thus *Washington Post* correspondent Elizabeth Becker, who once took a somewhat benign view of the Pol Pot regime, now believes that "the KPNLF has become the 'third force' — neither communist nor corrupt — that Americans searched for during all the years of their involvement in Indochina." (January 28, 1985.) On the other hand, the *Wall Street Journal's* chief political writer, never one to mince words, thinks that Son Sann is "our kind of guy" (May 8, 1981), while another writer declares bluntly: "The KPNLF is, in fact, similar to other democratic liberation movements that have sprung up in recent years to fight Soviet-backed Marxist regimes, such as the contras in Nicaragua or the Afghan freedom fighters." (*Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 14, 1985.) Along with these testimonies to the KPNLF's ideological credentials, there has been a fever of propaganda suggesting that it has been the most effective of the counter-revolutionary groups and the one most feared by the PRK and its Vietnamese allies.

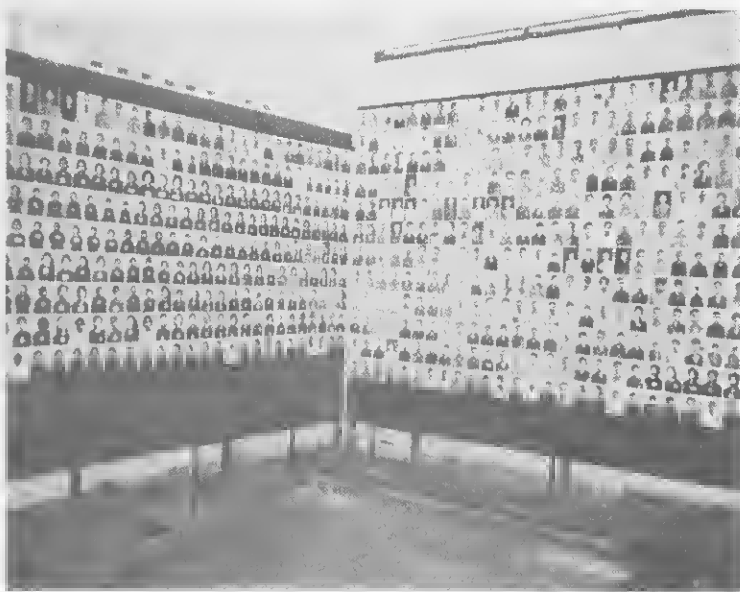
However the only thing accurate about these assertions is the statement that the KPNLF is the Kampuchean equivalent of the Nicaraguan contras. Founded by Gen. Dien Del, a commander in the army of the U.S.-backed Lon Nol regime, the KPNLF was able to enlist other former Lon Nol functionaries as it became clear that U.S. aid could be obtained by a Kampuchean insurgency that would represent an alternative to Pol Pot. As a result, the ranks of the KPNLF swelled — estimates prior to the PRK-Vietnamese counter-insurgency offensive of



Skeleton remnants excavated from mass graves outside Phnom Penh.



Silber chatting with Kampuchean soldier, Kompong Speu Province.



Photographs of Kampuchean communists executed by Pol Pot, now on display on walls of former Tuol Sleng prison, Phnom Penh.



Downtown Phnom Penh.



Marketplace, downtown Phnom Penh.



Park, Mekong River waterfront.



Young pioneers at political rally.



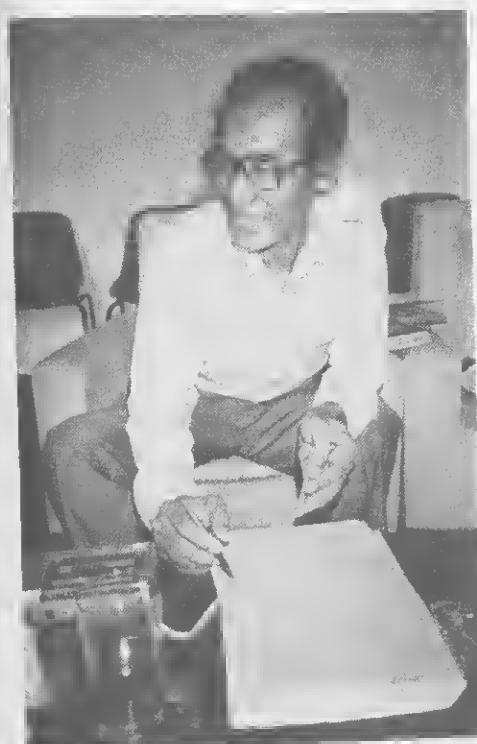
Students, Library of the Phnom Penh Medical Faculty.



Center of research for traditional medicine, Phnom Penh.



Kampuchean roadside, Kandal Province.



Minister of Agriculture, Kong-Som Ol.



Privately owned and operated stall in public market, Phnom Penh.



Religious ceremony, Buddhist Temple Cheoung Ek area on outskirts of Phnom Penh.



Peasant with cattle, Takeo Province.



Tiv Chhiv Ky, Technical Director, restored textile factory,  
Russey-Keo #2, Phnom Penh.



Women workers, Russey-Keo Textile Factory #2, Phnom Penh.



Children being trained on sewing machines, Phnom Penh orphanage.



Kampuchean factory worker, Phnom Penh.

early 1985 were that the group had 10-15,000 troops — but their military capacity was highly dubious. As William Branigin noted for the *Washington Post*:

"Guerrilla struggle is largely alien to the front's military leadership, made up mostly of officers who served under the Lon Nol government that took power in a 1970 coup and was toppled by the Khmer Rouge in 1975. They and the camp leaders who have emerged as local warlords seem to value their settled life styles in the resistance bases, where they acquired — considering the circumstances — relatively comfortable homes with such amenities as video players and gardens." (*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Jan. 20, 1985.)

The underlying weakness of the counter-revolution was graphically demonstrated early in 1985 when a joint PRK-Vietnamese military operation overran and eliminated the entire string of base camps which had operated just inside the Kampuchean border for more than five years. Despite wishful thinking that this defeat might turn out to be a good thing for the rebel cause by forcing the Kampuchean contras to conduct more extensive guerrilla operations deeper inside the country, no such activity materialized. By April, 1985, Hanoi was able to announce a further reduction in the number of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea — the fourth such withdrawal.

That the counter-revolution continues to retain any viability at all is not due to its own prowess but to the determination of China, the U.S. and Thailand to harass the Vietnamese and Kampuchean revolutions and slow up their consolidation at relatively little cost to themselves. There also remains the danger of a larger, regional war developing should China and the U.S. press Thailand into a Kampuchean adventure — a possibility which cannot be ruled out given the Reagan administration's enchantment with surrogate wars against Marxist regimes.

Despite that somewhat remote possibility — and there is no reason to believe that it would succeed or that the Thai regime would risk such a potentially costly venture\* — there seems

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\*The objective conditions for revolution in Thailand are ripe and have been for some time. But with the Thai revolutionary movement in crisis, Thai authorities might be emboldened to risk a military confrontation



little doubt seven years after the ouster of the Pol Pot regime and the establishment of the PRK that, in the words of both the Kampuchean and Vietnamese communists, "the situation in Kampuchea is irreversible." Thanks to the rapid maturation of the Kampuchean communists themselves — especially as reflected in the careful and judicious domestic policy they have unfolded — and the critical assistance provided by Vietnam (with crucial backing from the Soviet Union) the Kampuchean revolution is back on track and beginning to lay the foundations of socialism.

### Building the Foundations of Socialism

The long-range goal of the KPRP is to lead Kampuchea to socialism. Unlike the Pol Pot group, however, the KPRP bases its strategic program on the thesis that the transition to socialism will undoubtedly be a lengthy one and that an all-sided transformation of the relations of production — most especially the abolition of private property — is thoroughly bound up with a series of qualitative advances in the level of development of the forces of production in Kampuchea. Similarly — and again in distinction to the Pol Pot group — the KPRP believes that socialist transformation cannot proceed without the masses of people being persuaded by their own experience of the desirability of the new social order and relations.

Although the completion of this process may well take decades, the initial steps toward this strategic goal are already being taken. The most important of these has been the re-establishment of the KPRP on the basis of a Marxist-Leninist world outlook and the restoration of its role as the political

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with the Vietnamese. Of all the Maoist parties in Southeast Asia, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) suffered the greatest confusion and setbacks in the wake of Pol Pot's ouster. Pledging support to the Thai government in fighting "Vietnamese-Soviet aggression in the region," the CPT leadership plunged the party into an irreversible internal crisis. Since that time, the CPT has suffered a total collapse. The remaining Thai Marxist-Leninists are still only in the initial stages of summation and regroupment.

vanguard of the Kampuchean people. While regaining the confidence of the masses was no easy task, it has been accomplished steadily and with relative speed. Such a relationship is of course indispensable in enabling the communists to chart the country's future with the qualitative backing and cooperation of the masses.

In this section we will focus on the KPRP's conception of how the foundations of the Kampuchean economy will be transformed step by step in the direction of socialism. Given the present circumstances, principal emphasis is being given to restoring and advancing agriculture, reviving industry as the basic state sector of the economy and stimulating internal trade and commerce.

### Agriculture.

The most pressing economic challenge facing the PRK — both in terms of feeding its population and laying the basis for the long-term transformation of social relations — inevitably is concentrated in agriculture. In this respect, the problems confronting the new regime when it came to power in 1979 were enormous.

Contrary to a widespread mythology promoted both by certain imperialist ideologues and some on the left, Kampuchea has never been a land of overflowing abundance. (The political point of this mythology, of course, is to suggest that Kampuchea was in excellent economic shape until 1979 when the Vietnamese intervened.) In one of the most definitive investigations ever made into Kampuchean agriculture, Hou Yuen, himself a close associate of Pol Pot and one of the leading figures in the Khmer Rouge until the time of his execution in 1977, wrote in 1955:

"The rate of surplus output is low . . . [and] cannot be reasonably estimated at more than 50% in the best cases (dry season rice fields, floating rice fields, certain river-bank land). The general average rate of surplus output is about 20%. This corresponds to economic and social realities. . . . The tools of production are archaic, there is no use of fertilizer, cultivation risks are high and yields are mediocre." (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 56.)

Nor were natural conditions particularly favorable, as Kieran points out:

"A survey of paddy soils in all the countries of tropical Asia revealed that Kampuchean soils are the poorest in four of 14 soil qualities and second or third poorest in seven others. In none of these qualities were Kampuchean soils found to be above the tropical Asian average, making them the least fertile of all. A selection of soils in nearby Thailand, for instance, were found to be poorer than the Kampuchean in four of the soil qualities, but richer in nine others. Kampuchean farmers were concentrated in the country's poorest soil regions, and remained so even while the population quadrupled in the period 1900-50. Kampuchean yields, according to economist Remy Prud'homme, 'have hardly increased beyond one ton per hectare in the last half century. They are among the lowest in the world.'" (*ibid.*, pp. 31-32.)

The fact that Kampuchea was a rice-exporting country during this period and in subsequent years under Sihanouk's rule was not based, therefore, on overflowing abundance, but on the semi-feudal relations of exploitation by which a Kampuchean landlord class appropriated a major portion of the rice production and, keeping the peasantry bound to an extremely low subsistence level, sold this "surplus" on the international market.

Pol Pot's defenders claim that under Khmer Rouge rule, this problem was solved. In fact it was compounded tenfold. What is true is that for a brief period, up until 1977, there was a significant rise in rice production, the immediate result of the shortsighted population policy which threw the overwhelming majority of the people into forced agricultural work. But this could not be sustained. The lack of mechanization meant that a huge amount of labor power was being expended in order to achieve only a quantitative gain in agricultural production, but the actual surplus (over and above subsistence and new plantings) was minimal. Meanwhile, other necessities were not being produced at all. By 1977, the disastrous contradictions inherent in this simple-minded policy came to the fore. Portions of the rice crop were exported in order to obtain other necessities — fuel, clothing, military equipment, etc. — but at the expense of the people's living standards.

The myopic concentration on rice production combined

with the regime's distrust of intellectuals and their functions led to a kind of economic cannibalism aptly described by the PRK's present Minister of Agriculture, Kong-Som Ol,\* himself an involuntary member of a Pol Pot agricultural labor battalion:

"You know what Pol Pot did to the tractors? He cut the rubber tires to make shoes. Do you know how much one pair of tractor tires costs? And how much you pay for a pair of shoes? And from one tractor tire, they can make about five pairs of shoes, that's all. And they did the same with cars. They melted down the engine to cast frying pans and boiling pans. That is why you have so many carcasses of old tractors and cars around here. That is why after liberation we had nothing in our hands. . . . And they never kept records. For example, in meteorology — you know, the weather. They kept no records of the weather! They have been gone for five years, and if you had ten tons of gold you could not go out and buy those documents." (From an interview with Ann Schwartz and the author, Phnom Penh, Sept. 18, 1984.)

These objective conditions in agriculture which the PRK inherited from both nature and history were compounded by three other problems which were the direct result of Pol Pot's historical detour. The country's already backward irrigation and flood control network was left in a state of disrepair and chaos, largely the consequence of unscientific engineering policies followed by the Khmer Rouge regime. The population was dispersed throughout the country, far from home and family. And in a greatly reduced labor force the ratio of surviving women to men was close to two-to-one, an enormous problem in rebuilding what would inevitably be for some time to come a labor-intensive agriculture.

Taking into account these difficult objective conditions, the immediate survival needs of the nation, and the long-range goal of developing socialist relations of production in agriculture, the KPRP developed a policy based on two key principles: peasant families would have unqualified title to their

\*Kong-Som Ol is a widely respected, U.S.-trained agronomist, who served in the agricultural ministries of both the Sihanouk and Lon Nol governments. Not a communist, he has turned his skills over to the PRK, believing that the new government has the best chance of saving his country.

land and proprietorship over its product; and the government would encourage — both ideologically and with material assistance — the voluntary formation of self-managing Solidarity Production Teams (SPTs) for mutual assistance and a distribution system based on the concept, "to each according to work."

By mid-1984, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, close to 70% of peasant families were in some form of SPT, leaving more than 30% still operating on a completely individual basis. Both individual peasants and SPTs were free to dispose of their produce as they saw fit — retaining whatever they wanted for their own consumption and selling the remainder either to the government or on the free market.

While government prices are fixed and generally tend to be lower than free market prices, the government's monopoly and relatively low prices on certain crucial commodities — fertilizer, fuel, bicycles, tires, agricultural machinery, etc. — are a strong inducement to trade with the state. The free market, on the other hand, has the advantage of higher prices and payments in cash, enabling the peasants to buy a variety of consumer goods only available on the open market, as they see fit. On average, say officials, most peasants sell about half their disposable crop to the government and half on the free market.

Clearly the SPT is the form of organization which the KPRP sees as the first significant step toward socialist forms. The typical SPT consists of 12-15 families in the same village who, to a greater or lesser degree, engage in cooperative economic activity.\* While regulations governing them vary somewhat — all matters relating to the internal functioning of the SPTs are determined by the members themselves with no government representatives even present at the meetings — broadly speaking the SPTs fall into two types. The more advanced SPT is one in which a wide variety of tasks is carried out collectively and the income is apportioned out to team members proportionately to their labor. The lower form utilizes collective effort for plowing and transplanting, but then families are pretty much left on their own.

\*In the first two years, SPTs were larger, going as high as 50 families. But these were found to be inefficient and too difficult to self-manage.

An important adjunct to the SPTs is what is called the "family economy." This term is used to describe family economic activity, over and above rice production, in which the fruits of the labor accrue to the individual families. In the main, this is to encourage the cultivation of fresh vegetables and the raising of swine and poultry, but it might also include certain kinds of handicrafts as well. Such produce is sold directly by the family on the free market and is not subject to distribution through the SPT.

In addition to bringing the strength of collective labor — and division of labor — to bear in concrete agricultural tasks, the SPT system begins to inculcate socialist values among the peasants. Distribution of the collective surplus forces team members to make broad economic and social decisions, allocating shares of the surplus to non-agricultural workers (district teachers and nurses, for instance), taking responsibility for non-productive village elders and orphan children, taking responsibility for widows, and determining distribution on the basis of labor expended.\*

The SPT system likewise trains team members in socialist self-management. The team leader must develop an overall plan which is then submitted to the SPT as a whole for discussion. A deputy keeps records of people's labor. The team must deal with the government if it wants to purchase fertilizer or get the use of a tractor. And the relative merits of selling crops to the government or the free market must be weighed. The teams also reinforce security, helping to guard against saboteurs by doing guard duty at night, and in general by creating a climate in which the appearance of strangers in the village will be promptly noted and reported.

The aim of the KPRP is to eventually draw the entire peasantry into some form of SPT, usually into the less developed form at first and then step by step into the more advanced form. But patience is the watchword. "The Party says don't push the

\*In a typical SPT, "good workers" receive a 100% share of the divisible surplus, those who may not work every day may receive an 80% share, school-children who also work would get a 50% share and those who own and contribute draft animals to the SPT would get a 50% share.

team from one form to another," says Kong-Som Ol. "Let them figure it out for themselves and come to their own conclusions." (*ibid.*)

The government is not neutral, however. The more advanced the form of social organization of an SPT, the more assistance it will receive from the government. What is also true, however, is that the more advanced teams are in a better position to utilize government assistance because of the broader range of collective tasks they undertake.

But even the advanced SPT is only a way-station to higher forms, the key to which, says Kong-Som Ol, is mechanization. He illustrates his point this way:

"I can imagine that as the Solidarity Production Group develops and accumulates capital it will come to me and ask the government to sell them a tractor. So I say, yes, we are happy to sell you a tractor. But how many hectares of land do you have? So they say, maybe 30 or 40 hectares. I say, well, you will waste your money, because a tractor is supposed to work 500 to 600 hectares of land a year. So if you want a tractor for 40 hectares of land, it is impossible for you to have it, it's not good for you to have it. So they answer, we will plow for all the other Solidarity Groups.

"So we must ask them, why do you want to do it by yourself? You are going to be a businessman again. You will work for your own land and then you have to work on the other land and then you have to hire your tractor to the other people too. But why don't you let the government do it? Because if you have a tractor, you have to have a mechanic and one or two drivers, and then you have to have all kinds of repairs and tools and so on. And that costs a lot of money.

"Then, they say, what if we organize about 50 groups to make 400 or 500 hectares? I say, that's good. You go and organize and come back to us.

"And some groups already come to us for motor pumps, and I say, if you organize with ten other groups, it's easier for you, it's cheaper. And then we sell a pump to them. The idea is that we would like them to understand working collectively and socially." (*ibid.*)

By the time 60 to 70 percent of all Kampuchean peasants are in the more advanced SPTs, says Kong-Som Ol, Kampuchea will, in effect, have a developed cooperative system in agriculture. "We may never use the word, however," he says, "because

both Sihanouk and Pol Pot used the word cooperative for forms of organization which were, each in their own way, oppressive of the great mass of peasants. But that's what it will be." (*ibid.*)

### Industry

The socialist sector of the Kampuchean economy is its fledgling industry. Centralizing ownership of Kampuchea's industry in the hands of the state did not require a major ideological or political battle since the bulk of pre-1975 enterprises were owned either by foreign capital or Kampucheans who had long since fled the country. (Pol Pot's fatal misassessment was to treat the professional managers and skilled technicians of Kampuchea's industrial enterprises as "hostile class elements" whose elimination took precedence over maintaining, much less expanding, the existing level of industry.) As a result, there did not exist in Kampuchea in 1979 a class of enterprise owners who had to be expropriated; nor was there any longer a question concerning the holdings of foreign capital. Presumably, the government would welcome forms of investment from the capitalist world — subject to the usual qualifications and controls that socialist countries impose — but this is not likely any time soon.

Developing Kampuchean industry will of course be much harder, longer and more tedious than the resurrection of agriculture. Most industrial enterprises were cannibalized or damaged during the Pol Pot years. Surviving mechanical equipment invariably came originally from capitalist countries — principally France, the U.S., West Germany and Japan — and replacement parts are generally unavailable, either because of outright embargo, a shortage of hard currency to purchase them or the discontinuation of their manufacture. And while a small corps of trained managers and skilled workers has been reassembled, a new generation of industrial workers will have to be educated and trained. In short, progress will be marked in decades.

Broadly speaking, industry falls into three categories: light industry, consisting of consumer products, based principally on the needs (and developing purchasing power) of the Kam-

puclean peasantry; heavy industry, which, in addition to plants producing spare parts for existing machinery and agricultural equipment, includes production of brick, cement and pig iron; and industrial crops whose cultivation is largely for export, providing Kampuchea with commodities it can exchange with the socialist countries for a great variety of industrial and manufacturing products and, to a certain extent, with a hard currency income.

From this it can be seen that command of industry enables the PRK to orchestrate a key sector of the Kampuchean economy and to establish conscious priorities in production based on a conception of the country's long-term development rather than on immediate profit.

This modest beginning of reviving and developing Kampuchea's industry is also making the country's small working class into a more significant political force. Wage-workers have never been a major factor in the politics of this overwhelmingly peasant country. But today, even though their numbers are still small, much rests both on their growth as a class and on their ideological formation.

As a result, such mass organizations as the trade unions, the youth organization and the women's federation are all active in the country's factories, their principal functions being mass political and ideological training. The trade unions also take responsibility for production, participating in the discussions which evaluate (and either accept or modify) state-assigned quotas and the enterprise level plan of production, as well as looking out for workers' health and safety, etc.

While actual wages are still relatively low, factory workers are provided with free housing, electricity and running water. They are also supplied with cloth, rice and soap at much cheaper prices than they would have to pay on the open market. In addition, a system of material incentives makes bonuses available to the most productive workers.

The determining role of industry in Kampuchea's socialist future thus rests on two factors: it is the one sector of the economy which can bring about the leap in the level of development of the productive forces on which the material foundation for socialism depends; and it is likewise the one sector of the economy which will bring into being that social force whose own

interests coincide with the full development of socialism, the modern day proletariat.

### Trade and Commerce

Although a number of state-owned shops have been opened up — principally in Phnom Penh — Kampuchea's internal domestic trade and commerce remains overwhelmingly in private hands. It will probably stay that way for some time to come. The free market operates with little or no restriction in four areas: for the purchase of rice from the SPTs or private peasants; for the purchase and resale of the products of the "family economy"; for the sale of personal services such as transportation, hair care, etc.; and for the sale of "hard to get" goods "smuggled" into the country from abroad, chiefly from Thailand.

At the same time, the state/socialist sector of the economy retains significant controls over private trade and commerce. For example, the government can supervise and regulate the rice trade simply by virtue of its monopoly on most of the agricultural implements used and needed by the peasants. By raising the price it is willing to pay the peasants for their rice, it can shrink supplies to the free market; and by lowering its selling price for rice, it can flood the free market and force prices down there as well. The state is also a major competitor on the free market — the supplier of most domestically manufactured consumer products which constitute a major portion of the commodities for sale. Government control of public services, electricity, water supplies and land space in the cities is likewise a powerful means of keeping the private sector within acceptable limits. And finally, permitting the "smugglers" to function in a semi-legal fashion allows the state the option to tighten or ease up on the availability of certain commodities based upon other economic and political considerations.

Like privately-owned, small-scale agriculture, free enterprise in the realm of trade and commerce will reproduce and reinforce capitalist relations with all its accompanying ideological and political problems. Recognition of that reality is essential and Kampuchea's communists can afford to have no illusions on that score. But it does not follow that for Kampuchea

— and for many other socialist revolutions as well — the immediate elimination of these pockets of capitalism can be effected by a subjective "communist decree" alone. In the Kampuchean context, Pol Pot's infantile left attempt to do just that is the grim verification of this essential materialist approach to socialist construction. Every indication is that the orientation of the KPRP on this matter is fundamentally sound and stable.

The policy of allowing a relatively free hand to private commodity production (in agriculture and handicrafts) and commodity exchange is quite deliberate. Its immediate purpose is to rapidly re-establish a "normal" economic life throughout the country thereby bringing the most arbitrary and oppressive feature of the Pol Pot nightmare to an end. The restoration of a functional economy is the precondition for a broader social leap which will, in turn, require a qualitative expansion of Kampuchea's productive forces under state control. It is only with such a foundation that the reservoir of capitalist relations, which the PRK has no choice at present but to permit and encourage, can ultimately be made untenable.

### Unity of the Indochinese Countries

The Comintern's 1930 assessment that the revolutions in Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea would unfold as part of a single Indochinese revolutionary process has been more than amply verified by history. (U.S. imperialism's "domino theory" about the stakes involved in the Vietnam War was, in so far as the three Indochinese countries were concerned, a correct appraisal of this reality from the other side of the class barricades.) When revolutionaries in all three countries based their strategy on this assessment, they invariably scored significant gains in their individual as well as collective struggles. When Indochinese revolutionary unity was weakened, the revolutionary cause in each country was likewise threatened. In this sense, the principle of Indochinese unity was not an arbitrary thesis which the communists imposed on the revolution in each country. Rather it was, and remains, a scientific, theoretical reflection of the objective facts and laws of social change binding Indochina together.

Indeed, the entire Pol Pot episode marked the lowest point

in the revolutionary unity of the three Indochinese peoples — a costly lesson which will probably never be forgotten by the parties and peoples of Indochina. The rise to power of the Pol Pot faction brought with it the near destruction of the Kampuchean revolution — a setback that was inextricably bound up with an unsavory alliance with Maoist China to foster antagonism and hostility toward Vietnam and secondarily Laos. U.S. imperialism took the most conscious and fullest advantage of this opening — the break in the revolutionary united front of Indochina — to retrench itself throughout Southeast Asia (especially in Thailand) and even to contemplate for a time a possible refooting in Kampuchea itself working through Chinese surrogates.

Since Pol Pot's Kampuchea was definitely the "weak link" around which imperialism plotted its counterattack in the region, its counter-revolutionary maneuvers underscored once again the fact that the "special relationship" between the Indochinese countries applies as much to the period of defense and consolidation of revolutionary power as it did to the liberation struggle itself. An article in the Vietnamese journal, *People's Army*, in December, 1984, concisely summed up the content of that relationship:

"If in the past in order to achieve liberation, the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea had to ally with one another and fight shoulder to shoulder against the common enemy, today for purposes of national construction and defense they must build ties of special solidarity, strategic alliance and close combat coordination according to a common strategic plan. On the strength of this solidarity and alliance, the revolution in the three Indochinese countries has won victory after victory. Conversely, whenever this solidarity and alliance was not firmly preserved the revolution in all the three countries would experience difficulties and suffer losses. It has also been proved that none of the three countries could live in safety and peace when the independence and freedom of any of the other two is threatened. . . .

"In the new stage of the revolution, this alliance of the three nations has developed to a new level and assumed new characteristics:

"Firstly, the three nations have regained complete independence and formed three separate states under the leadership of the genuine Marxist-Leninist parties and are engaged in the



construction and defense of their socialist motherlands.

"Secondly, the alliance of the three Indochinese countries has become an integral part of the socialist system and of the world revolutionary movement.

"Thirdly, the three countries are facing the same immediate and dangerous enemy: the Chinese expansionists and hegemonists, who are acting in collusion with the U.S. imperialists and are trying to undermine their solidarity and alliance in furtherance of a fundamental and long-term plan to weaken and annex the whole Indochinese peninsula and use it as the jumping-off place to expand into Southeast Asia.

"In view of these characteristics the Indochinese countries' alliance today is a socialist alliance, a strategic and combat alliance on a unified battlefield, an all-round alliance in the political, military, economic and cultural fields, aimed at helping one another build and defend their respective motherlands." (*Vietnam Courier* #4, 1985, p. 10.)

Although Vietnam has been accused of "exploiting" Kampuchea in the years since the overthrow of Pol Pot, the reality is quite different. "Of all economic aid we have received from other countries," says Nhim Vanda, Kampuchea's Vice-Minister of Planning, "by far the most all-sided and largest comes from Vietnam." (Interview in Phnom Penh, Sept. 20, 1984.) Even Soviet aid is second to the assistance provided by Hanoi. Vietnamese assistance takes a variety of forms from basic foodstuffs and medicines to a corps of industrial, scientific, medical and administrative professionals who are training Kampucheans in these respective fields.

Helping to rebuild the revolutionary alliance of the Indochinese peoples and countries has been the principal foreign policy achievement of the KPRP. The First Summit Conference of the Three Countries of Indochina held in Vientiane February 22-23, 1983, re-established close ties and the special relationship between Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea. A statement adopted at the conference pledged the countries to "cooperate and help each other to fulfill jointly the tasks of national construction on the road of socialism and to ensure national defense." Regular semi-annual meetings of the foreign ministers of the three countries have been held since, and joint planning on questions of economic development, foreign policy and military matters has proceeded. In April, 1984, the cul-

tural ministers of all three countries met for the first time to develop plans for extensive cultural exchanges between them. Relatively open borders between the countries are also further cementing the traditional ties among the border populations based upon natural economic activity. Increasingly teachers, medical personnel, engineers, urban planners, artists and scientists are being trained and acquiring experience outside their own countries — both in other countries of Indochina and in the countries of the socialist camp. Most important of all, the ideological unity of the communists of Indochina has been reforged based on proletarian internationalism.

Far from obliterating the national identity of the three Indochinese peoples, the rebuilt alliance between them has set the most favorable conditions once again for fully developing their individuality of language, culture and custom. It has also established the indispensable political condition for safeguarding their respective revolutions and thereby fully realizing their distinct national development.

### Conclusion

The rescue of the Kampuchean revolution is a major accomplishment which the Vietnamese and Khmer communists have rendered the peoples of their countries, the socialist camp, and the international working class movement more broadly. Vietnam's courageous decision to play the role it did in Kampuchea was bound to incur the wrath of its powerful neighbor to the north and to provide imperialism and its allies with a pretext for stepping up their counter-revolutionary designs against the countries of Indochina.

The caterwauling quibbles of those on the left who found themselves embarrassed by Vietnam's assertion of revolutionary power — to say nothing of the lingering cries of the Maoists who once again find themselves in league with imperialist-backed contras — must fade into historical insignificance in the face of what has been accomplished in Indochina over the past seven years. A revolution derailed by a rampantly chauvinist, infantile left deviation in the communist movement has been put back on track. A people and a country brought to the brink of extinction have been resuscitated. A



major counter-revolutionary enterprise with powerful international patrons has been dealt a devastating military and political setback. In Kampuchea itself, the difficult process of effecting the transition to socialism has begun. Revolutionary power in all three Indochinese countries has been reinforced and the revolutionary alliance strengthened. The outpost of socialism established in Southeast Asia as the result of the arduous revolutionary struggles of the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea has been successfully defended and secured, its ties to the socialist camp stronger than ever. And once again, machinations of U.S. imperialism — in this instance working in close cooperation with a Chinese party and government which continues to function as a renegade force in world communism — have been frustrated by the joint efforts of Indochinese revolutionaries and the socialist camp.

With this accomplishment, the communists of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea have made yet another profound contribution to the cause of peace, justice and socialism.

## 5

## A THEORETICAL POSTSCRIPT: The Debate Over 'National Sovereignty'

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The principal theoretical issue underlying the Kampuchean debate is contained in the charge that Vietnam's role in bringing about the ouster of Pol Pot was indefensible because, in doing so, Vietnam violated Kampuchea's "national sovereignty."

We will not dwell here on the blatant hypocrisy of those imperialist ideologues who indulge in such rhetoric. For them, the only national sovereignty that really matters is defending the national interests of their respective imperialisms, both against other competing imperialist interests and certainly against the resistance of its victims.

However, this argument also has been raised by many on the left. The refrain heard over and over again is that no matter what problems may have beset the Kampuchean revolution, it was wrong for an "outside force" to be the instrument for Kampuchea's national salvation. At the time the *Guardian* expressed the scattered sentiments of many leftists in this way: "If it (the Pol Pot regime) was half as repressive as its critics say, it should have been overthrown — but by the revolutionary forces of Kampuchea, not by invading armies of another socialist country" (Feb. 28, 1979.)

In one form or another, this argument has had wide resonance on the left, the "self-determination of nations" being invoked as an absolute principle — a "cornerstone of socialism," no less — whose violation for any reason whatsoever is deemed incompatible with Marxism-Leninism. On this basis, any political action not indigenous to the nation in question that helps determine the political fate of that nation is, *ipso facto*, a violation of the "principle" of self-determination. Thus

Vietnam's intervention in bringing about the removal of the Pol Pot regime and its continued military defense of the present Kampuchean regime — no matter how salutary the political results of those actions — supposedly violates this newly defined socialist "principle."

Two other versions of this same theme have likewise been advanced in the name of Marxism-Leninism. One is that while national sovereignty might not be looked at as an "absolute" right under capitalism, it becomes an absolute right under socialism, and any attempt to "limit" it — i.e., the doctrine of "limited sovereignty" — is a violation of communist principle. Again, from this point of view, Vietnam's role in the removal of Pol Pot was *by definition* an unacceptable limit on the sovereignty of another socialist country.

Finally the argument has been advanced that even if Vietnam's purpose in intervening in Kampuchea was to save the Kampuchean revolution from destruction, in doing so it was violating the "communist principle" that "revolution cannot be exported."

Since the theoretical aspect of this polemic has been posed at the level of "socialist principles" and Marxist-Leninist theory, it must be fought out on that basis. In doing so, it will be necessary to quote at some length from Lenin's writings on the questions of national sovereignty and self-determination. This is done not only because Lenin's contributions in this area enormously enriched Marxist theory, but more especially because his comments have so often been distorted through selective quotation by those who try to use Lenin to justify theses which are the very antithesis of his contributions to Marxist theory on these questions.

Before plunging into the content of each of these arguments, however, it is necessary to establish one fundamental point. At the risk of offending some sensibilities, it must be asserted in no uncertain terms that Marxism-Leninism is not based on "principles." It offers neither a code of behavior nor a canon of ethics — political or personal. This point was first established by the founders of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels: "The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely ex-

press, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes." (*Selected Works in One Volume*, p.46.)

In other words, Marxist-Leninist theory is a body of thought which, generalizing from concrete historical experience, attempts to posit at a higher level of abstraction the actual laws of social and historical development concentrated in the class struggle. While every political decision made by the communists is — in a broad sense — informed by this body of Marxist theory, those decisions are made on the basis of concrete political assessments of the class struggle as it is actually encountered in the real world. In this sense, all "principles" are ultimately subordinate to the political realities of the class struggle — how to advance the cause of the international proletariat and defend the victories already achieved; nothing more, but also nothing less.

### National Sovereignty Absolute?

The starting point therefore for a Marxist discussion of the concepts "national sovereignty" and "self-determination of nations" is that neither of these are absolute principles transcending particular historical epochs nor the actual politics of the class struggle. Rather they are "rights" which accrue to human societies organized in national forms during a definite period of history. (In the various epochs prior to the rise of nations — that is, prior to the emergence of modern capitalism — such concepts have no meaning.)

And because nations are a particular form of social and political organization which arise while society is still divided into antagonistic classes, the "rights" of nations — to national sovereignty and self-determination — are *democratic rights* in which all of the contending classes have a stake. However, one of the central theoretical insights of Marxism is precisely that all democratic rights (including the rights of nations) are ultimately subordinated to the compulsions of the class struggle. This is not a view held by the communists alone. All class forces, whether they acknowledge this to be the case or not, function on that basis. Indeed, since the class struggle is the motor force of history, they cannot do otherwise. The com-

munists, as the political representatives of the working class, have no need to disguise their intentions in this regard. For in the final analysis the working class (and by extension all the toiling masses) can never enjoy genuine democracy (their full rights) until the working class secures its position as the ruling class of society.

Or, to put it another way, the driving goal of the working class is socialism (and, ultimately, a totally classless society) because it is only on the basis of socialism that the working class can end its own exploitation and reorganize society in accordance with its own class interests. To the extent that the national struggle aids the struggle for socialism — and in the era of imperialism, by and large it does — then the communists take up this struggle and try to give it a political direction which simultaneously advances the class interests of the working class. At the same time, since the struggle for socialism is one in which the entire international working class has a stake, the permanent *community of interest* between workers of different countries is ultimately of greater significance to the proletariat than the relative temporary community of interest (in broad historical terms) it shares with the bourgeois classes of its own country. This is precisely the advanced point of view that the communists bring to the working class and national liberation struggles.

Thus Lenin states unequivocally:

"While recognizing equality and equal rights to a national state, [the proletariat] values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletarians of all nations, and assesses any national demand, any national separation, *from the angle of the workers' class struggle*." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 411, emphasis in original.)

In other words, the working class cannot accord the democratic rights of *nations* primacy over its own interests as a class; for ultimately, as Lenin said in his historic debate with Kautsky, the question comes down to "democracy for what class." At the same time, especially since Lenin, communists recognize that in the present era the struggles of oppressed nations for self-determination and national sovereignty by and large weaken imperialism and have become one of the most intense expressions of the international class struggle.

The rise of the modern bourgeois nation-state — which could only be accomplished, for the most part, by welding together and creating a single national identity out of smaller social and political units — was the necessary political accompaniment to the rise and growth of capitalism. The development of a national capital, a national market, and a national economic and political infrastructure undermined the old feudal mode of production and the entire system of feudal oppression and brought humanity to the threshold of that revolution in the level of the productive forces which constitutes the indispensable condition for the emergence of the proletariat and the beginning of the end of class exploitation.

In this historical sense, the movements to forge the modern bourgeois state were, for the most part, progressive developments in their time. But like everything else engineered by the bourgeoisie, the modern nation-state was not built on the basis of equality. Whole peoples were subjugated against their will and — as in the building of the U.S. — millions were even forcibly transported into a system of chattel slavery. As a result, national movements seeking democratic rights and, at times, self-determination and political separation, also arose; and, for the most part — but not always — such movements coincided with the political struggle of the working class as a whole for its emancipation.

In the imperialist era, the movement for national sovereignty (independence) and self-determination took on another character. Now that movement was, for the most part, directed not against feudalism but against imperialism — that is, the highest stage of capitalism.\* Because the maturation of the anti-colonial movement coincided with the maturation of the

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\*In some countries, where significant remnants of feudalism continued to exist, feudal forces were also attracted to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle for class reasons of their own. Some of these forces might be drawn into the broad anti-colonial front, but in the main the proletarian elements were obliged to wage a bitter struggle with the indigenous feudal elements over who would lead the independence movement. For instance, today in Afghanistan, feudal forces utilizing the slogans of national sovereignty and self-determination have been at the core of the counter-revolution.

proletarian movement — and because both were directed at the imperialist system — the national liberation struggle in the colonies and semi-colonies took on an added character, becoming part of the generalized worldwide proletarian struggle for socialism.

It was under these circumstances that modern Marxist theory on the national question developed and the demands for self-determination of the peoples and nations oppressed by colonialism and imperialism became a part of the international proletarian arsenal. This historic advance for the communist movement was won only as the result of a most determined struggle, led by Lenin, against those on the left who either dismissed the anti-colonial struggle as having no class significance for the proletariat or, in some cases, actually adopted a national chauvinist position which saw socialism in the "mother" country as the indispensable condition for freeing the colonies — in which eventuality, the colonies would have no "need" for their own self-determination.

Lenin's writings on this question\* firmly established proletarian theses on the revolutionary character of the struggle for self-determination in the colonial and semi-colonial world. On the basis of these theses, communist parties were founded among the oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America and these parties undertook to win leadership of the national movements and wage the struggle for national democracy as a distinct and conscious stage of the proletarian revolution in their respective countries. It was under these circumstances that firm support of self-determination became a hallmark of international communist policy and demarcated communists from social democracy.

However, in adopting this view — and in distinguishing themselves as the most militant and consistent combatants in the struggle for national democracy and self-determination — the communists never took an absolutist view of the national movements or their demands. The communists never took the view that they were obliged to support *any and all* political

movements in oppressed countries simply because they declared themselves opposed to colonial rule. In a number of countries where reactionary national movements were able to win majority support among the people the communists never surrendered (on the basis of abstract principle) their right to contest for leadership. And for the working class movement in other countries — especially in the Soviet Union where the working class held state power — proletarian internationalism never meant support (including material and armed support) for any national movement simply because it espoused self-determination.

In every case, the communists had to determine the concrete politics and the relation of the national struggle to the world struggle against imperialism. Thus Lenin notes:

"The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society and, taking this society into due account, the Marxist fully recognizes the historical legitimacy of the national movements. But to prevent this recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements. . . . Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight for any kind of national development, for 'national culture' in general? Of course not." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 34-35.)

Even the demand for self-determination, *under certain circumstances*, might have to be opposed:

"The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a *small part* of the general democratic (now: general-socialist) *world* movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected." (*ibid.*, Vol. 22, p. 341.)

Bearing in mind that imperialism is not a passive bystander to the national struggle *and that it does not confine its opposition to the revolutionary potential of that struggle simply to blatant and explicit defense of its open domination*, Lenin warned:

"There is not one of these demands which could not serve and has not served, under certain circumstances, as an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the workers. To single out, in this respect, one of the demands of political democracy, specifically, the self-determination of nations, and to

\*See especially a useful one-volume collection, *National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism*, International Publishers, New York, 1968.

oppose it to the rest, is fundamentally wrong in theory. In practice, the proletariat can retain its independence only by subordinating its struggle for all democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie." (Lenin, 1970, p. 116.)

The fantastic assertion, therefore, that the communists look at such questions as national sovereignty and self-determination as *absolute principles* which they are obliged to uphold and support at all times and under all circumstances has no basis in Marxist-Leninist theory nor in history.

For one thing, Marxist theory views the right to self-determination — which can only mean the right to organize into an independent, self-governing political entity — as one which applies only to *nations*. Self-determination, in this sense, is not a right extended to a national minority, an ethnic grouping, a region, a cultural or religious group, etc.

In addition, the Marxists do not view the independence of states as progressive *in and of itself*. The Marxists oppose the forcible imposition of relations of inequality on oppressed nations and view the struggle for self-determination principally as the struggle for equality. But, as Lenin points out, "We do not advocate preserving small nations at all costs; *other conditions being equal*, we are decidedly for centralization and are opposed to the petty bourgeois ideal of federal relationships." (*ibid.*, p.108.)

In general, says Lenin:

"The aim of socialism is not only to end the division of mankind into tiny states and the isolation of nations in any form, it is not only to bring the nations closer together, but to integrate them. . . . Big states afford indisputable advantages, both from the standpoint of economic progress and from that of the interests of the masses." (*ibid.*, pp. 113-114.)

Time and again Lenin's significant "qualifications" have been crucial in enabling the communists to maintain their political bearings as the actual motion of politics has brought to the fore of the class struggle noteworthy "exceptions" to the general rule that national sovereignty should be upheld and the demands of nations for self-determination supported. But opportunists bent on conciliating bourgeois nationalism within

the communist and revolutionary movements have been careful to omit, deny or obscure these crucial qualifications while invoking the names of Marx and Lenin.

In 1939, for instance, the Soviet Union sent its troops across the border into neighboring Finland — an action which naturally evoked hypocritical cries of "poor little Finland" from not only the bourgeoisie but even among some "distressed" on the left. However the Soviet action was a deliberate move in order to prevent Finland from being used as a launching pad by the Nazis for their ultimate invasion of the Soviet Union. That pre-emptive action unquestionably saved the city of Leningrad, a key factor in the eventual Nazi defeat. *And yet the Soviet attack on Finland was, in a strict formal sense, a violation of Finland's national sovereignty.* Again, in 1956, Soviet troops marched into Hungary to oust an "emergency" government — and one, moreover, enjoying a significant measure of popular support — which had announced Hungary's intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. Without the Soviet action there seems little doubt that Hungary itself would have been lost to socialism and the emerging socialist camp seriously weakened and jeopardized. *And yet the Soviet intervention in Hungary was, in a formal sense, a violation of Hungary's national sovereignty and right of self-determination.*

In both examples (and there have been others)\* the pressing political compulsion of the international class struggle — the first against fascism, the second against U.S. imperialism's

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\*There are also those instances where the international proletariat has the tactical advantage of a formal request of assistance from the government in power threatened by a reactionary civil war (always with the fullest possible imperialist backing). And yet, the opportunists on the left who have so fetishized bourgeois "national sovereignty" remain blinded to the political stakes for the class struggle and proceed to belittle or dismiss outright this "technicality" and are driven into support for the imperialist side of the civil war in question — invoking Marxism-Leninism in their betrayal.

For example, in 1975 Cuban troops intervened in the civil war then raging in Angola where they proved the decisive factor in guaranteeing the victory of the MPLA over UNITA, the faction backed by South Africa and the U.S. Once again the charge was raised *in the name of Marxism*

attempts to "roll back" socialism to the Soviet borders — required subordinating in the concrete (not denying in general) both Finland's and Hungary's national sovereignty.

And yet, in the case of Kampuchea, there are those on the left who still try their best to avoid the class politics at stake. Thus the LRS, which *belatedly* acknowledges that "the Pol Pot government committed grievous acts against the Kampuchean people," still argues that there is only one issue at stake: "Kampuchea . . . has been *invaded* and *occupied* by Vietnam." (*Unity*, March 15, 1985.) The danger of permitting the Vietnamese action to go unchallenged, argues LRS, is that other countries will use similar pretexts for their aggression, such as the U.S. did in its invasion of Grenada. "We believe that no one who upholds genuine independence and anti-imperialism can condone an invasion, no matter how much 'revolutionary' rhetoric is used to 'prettify' it." (*ibid.*)

Typically, it does not seem to have occurred to U.S. Maoism's last remaining detachment that the political difference between *overthrowing* and *assisting* a revolution might enter into their calculations. To the minds of petty bourgeois nationalists, both are the same. An invasion is an invasion — regardless of the political issues at stake. This fixation on the Vietnamese "invasion" as the essence of the question would have drawn only scorn from Lenin who wrote:

"How can we disclose and define the 'substance' of a war? War is the continuation of policy. Consequently, we must examine

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that Cuba's action (regardless of Angola's request for assistance) was indefensible because it constituted "outside interference" in Angola's "national sovereignty."

Again in 1980 Soviet troops entered Afghanistan at the request of, and in defense of, a socialist-oriented government under siege from an imperialist-backed feudal reaction to the democratic reforms instituted from Kabul. Again the imperialist cry of "Soviet occupation" was echoed on the left, ushering in a new-found interest in Afghanistan's "national sovereignty." Those on the left who conciliate bourgeois nationalism still find themselves backing as "freedom fighters" a motley crew of feudal-oriented bandits whose program is to pull the Afghan masses back into the nineteenth century.

the policy pursued prior to the war, the policy that led to and brought about the war. . . . The Philistine does not realize that 'war is the continuation of policy,' and consequently limits himself to the formula that 'the enemy has attacked us,' 'the enemy has invaded my country,' without stopping to think *what issues* are at stake in the war, which classes are waging it and with what political object. . . . For the Marxist, the important thing is what issues are at stake in this war." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p.33.)

### National Sovereignty and Socialism

A more sophisticated expression of this same polemic concerns the question of national sovereignty in the context of the socialist system. Thus, in its initial position criticizing Vietnam for helping to remove the Pol Pot regime, the *Guardian* stated:

"The operative principle in this regard is respect for the territorial sovereignty of socialist countries and for the right of each to independently develop its own social system. . . . Every socialist country must develop according to its own conditions and objective laws, relying on the peoples of the various countries to settle their own accounts when necessary." (February 28, 1979.)

Reaffirming its position a year later, the *Guardian* drew out a broader theoretical framework when it "condemned" the Soviet Union "for its support of the invasion and for the revisionist doctrine of 'limited sovereignty' which provided the theoretical basis for Hanoi's incorrect policy." (January 23, 1980.)

One must be grateful to the author of this comment for trying to pose the question at such a level of political abstraction, for in doing so more generalized prejudices and ignorances prevalent on the U.S. left have been brought out into the open for discussion. Indeed, there are critical questions of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice at issue here — not as some universal code of political etiquette for socialist countries but in terms of the actual laws of development of the socialist camp as it emerges and develops in the midst of the fierce class struggles of the twentieth century. How will the socialist mode of production *which has already come into existence* be consolidated and strengthened — both economically and politically — in

the face of continued imperialist attacks and intrigues? How will the socialist camp help advance the world revolutionary process to completion while simultaneously defending and enhancing its position to affect and shape international politics and economics?

These questions do not emerge in the abstract. They are confronted every day by every socialist country in the form of concrete political decisions which must be made in the face of the actual motion of the class struggle.

The even broader question underlying these issues goes right to the heart of numerous debates which have engaged all who are nominally committed to socialism: will the historic transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale take place as a quantitative accumulative process in which individual countries throw off the yoke of capitalism and each develop their own particular national form of socialism? Or will this transition take place through a qualitative process in which a world socialist system, progressively integrating the economic and political life of a series of countries and focusing the political and material might of the socialist community in the international class struggle, ultimately replaces the imperialist system? And it is precisely around this political line struggle that the battle against nationalist deviations within the international communist movement and the socialist camp has always been, and continues to be, focused.

For example, the link between Maoism and Eurocommunism (the two most serious and damaging deviations in recent years) is that both hold to the first proposition. In fact, say both Maoists and Eurocommunists, for socialism to develop in any other fashion — especially as an integrated world system which, in its very motion, begins the lengthy process of integrating national economies and overcoming national distinctions — is a violation of each socialist country's national sovereignty and a fundamental departure from some newly discovered socialist "principles."

Marxism-Leninism, on the other hand, upholds the second proposition, not as a matter of "principle" but as an inexorable requirement of the class struggle as it actually has been encountered in the course of *constructing* and *defending* socialism.

The theoretical blindspot of Maoism and Eurocommunism

is that both reduce socialism — whose material foundation is fundamentally its mode of production — to the more superficial political forms of the struggle for power. Certainly no Marxist-Leninist would quarrel with the view that, in the main, the socialist revolution takes place — and will continue to take place — country by country; and that the particular strategy for the seizure of power will undoubtedly vary from country to country. However to advance such elementary truths as profound insights *and to say no more about the complex process of defending and consolidating revolutionary power and developing the material foundations for the socialist mode of production* is the height of philistinism in the realm of theory and suitable more to a "Little Red Book" level of theoretical discourse than to a Marxism-Leninism that addresses the complexities of the class struggle.

Even the view that the revolution is won on a country-by-country basis — unless framed by significant internationalist qualifications — is an illusion. For although the seizure of power may appear to be a completely indigenous enterprise, the actual strength of the contending forces is inevitably and fundamentally determined not by themselves alone but by the state of the class struggle in other countries (most especially neighboring countries), the prevailing contradictions internal to the imperialist system and increasingly, the prevailing world balance of forces between the two social systems of imperialism and socialism.\* Failure to recognize this reality, or

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\*Much of this common sense political orientation has been offset by the carefully constructed and widely popularized Maoist mythology regarding the Chinese revolution which has extensively rewritten Chinese history and abstracted out the key "external factors" that made the great Chinese revolution possible in 1949. Rather Maoism has advanced the partial and exaggerated summation that it was the completion of Mao's primitive strategy of "surrounding the cities from the countryside." Relegated to relatively minor footnotes were crucial international factors, among them being: China's longest border being with the USSR; the Soviet Red Army's occupation of Manchuria, acceptance of Japanese surrender and turning power over to communist-led "peoples committees" rather than Chiang Kai-Shek's officials — which set the basis for the full-scale civil war that followed; and the U.S. imperialist dilemma of having to "lose China" in order to concentrate most of its resources to "save Europe" from communism and "roll it back" as far as possible.



the tendencies to obscure and belittle it, are ideological remnants of bourgeois nationalism within the international communist movement which can have the most negative, and sometimes tragic, consequences for the fate of the revolutionary struggle in particular countries.

If this is the case prior to the seizure of power, it is doubly true as the revolution seeks to defend and consolidate its power and to set out on the path of socialist construction. In a period in which imperialism is increasingly desperate in fostering and supporting counter-revolution — and is developing ever more sophisticated military and political techniques for doing so — to assert that each revolution will be able to defend its power successfully simply by its own resources is the height of irresponsibility. But defense of revolutionary power cannot be a one-way street. Just as the socialist countries and the international working class movement take responsibility for helping to defend newly established revolutionary regimes, so too must the part defend the whole when it comes to the socialist camp, *if for no other reason than that the security of each socialist country is ultimately dependent on the strength of the socialist camp*. It was upon the recognition of this dialectic, both theoretically and in profoundly practical terms, that the notion of "limited sovereignty" has been advanced in attempts to grapple with the actual substance of internationalism as exercised between socialist countries in a period when imperialism is increasingly desperate to limit, weaken and ultimately break up the socialist camp.

The political essence of this internationalism was recognized even when there was still only one socialist country. In 1920, when the Soviet Union's own tasks of socialist development had barely begun, Lenin already spoke of the necessity:

"... of converting the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national dictatorship (i.e., existing in a single country and incapable of determining world politics) into an international one (i.e., a dictatorship of the proletariat involving at least several advanced countries, and capable of exercising a decisive influence upon world politics as a whole). Petty-bourgeois nationalism proclaims as internationalism the mere recognition of the equality of nations and nothing more. Quite apart from the fact that this recognition is purely verbal, petty bourgeois

nationalism preserves national self-interest intact, whereas proletarian internationalism demands, first, that the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world-wide scale, and, second, that a nation which is achieving victory over the bourgeoisie should be able and willing to make the greatest national sacrifices for the overthrow of international capital."\* (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 148.)

Furthermore, if the very process of defending revolutionary power in any socialist country demands a strengthening of internationalist ties, the task of the socialist transformation of society *economically* also requires a qualitative deepening and institutionalization of those ties.

In essence, those who argue that world socialism was not meant to develop as a single, increasingly integrated system but simply by each country developing its own nationally exclusive form of socialism can only imagine socialism unfolding historically in the same manner that capitalism did. Ideologically, such petty bourgeois views remain hostage to capitalism's principal political form, the bourgeois nation-state — which is why they reflect a nationalist deviation within the camp of socialism.

The roots of that deviation, Lenin pointed out, are socio-economic, but they have also been "encouraged" historically by the failure of proletarian forces in the developed capitalist countries to take up in a consistent manner the rights of those peoples oppressed by their "own" bourgeoisie.

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\* Lenin's last point here has frequently been interpreted in an ultra-left fashion, most especially by Trotskyism, which uses it as an argument against the socialist policy of peaceful coexistence. In fact, peaceful coexistence between socialist countries and imperialist countries — that is, non-interference in each other's internal affairs and normal relations of commerce, diplomacy and social intercourse — is a policy which tends to neutralize imperialist schemes of counter-revolution while at the same time setting favorable conditions for the steady strengthening of the socialist camp and the inevitable intensification of the class struggle in the imperialist world. The support given by the Soviet Union, many of the Eastern European countries, Vietnam and Cuba to revolutionary struggles throughout the world — as well as economic assistance to each other and to developing countries — typify the great national sacrifices which the socialist countries have willingly borne on behalf of internationalism.

"The age-old oppression of colonial and weak nationalities by the imperialist powers has not only filled the working masses of the oppressed countries with animosity toward the oppressor nations, but has also aroused distrust in these nations in general, even in their proletariat. The despicable betrayal of socialism of the majority of the official leaders of this proletariat in 1914-19, when 'defense of country' was used as a social-chauvinist cloak to conceal the defense of the 'right' of their 'own' bourgeoisie to oppress colonies and fleece financially dependent countries, was certain to enhance this perfectly legitimate distrust. On the other hand, the more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness. These prejudices are bound to die out very slowly, for they can disappear only after imperialism and capitalism have disappeared in the advanced countries, and after the entire foundation of the backward countries' economic life has radically changed. It is therefore the duty of the class-conscious communist proletariat of all countries to regard with particular caution and attention the survivals of national sentiments in the countries and among the nationalities which have been oppressed the longest; it is equally necessary to make certain concessions with a view to more rapidly overcoming this distrust and these prejudices. Complete victory over capitalism cannot be won unless the proletariat and, following it, the mass of working people in all countries and nations throughout the world voluntarily strive for alliance and unity." (*ibid.*, p. 150.)

Of course socialism, in its initial stages and for some time to come, can not arbitrarily eliminate the nation-state political form. But it *does* invest it with a new content based upon the new prevailing property (class) relations. Unlike the bourgeois nation-states whose underlying logic is to compete with each other for the defense of their home markets and for control of the world market, the logic of the proletarian states is to coordinate their efforts at socialist construction since their economies are not driven by the search for profit. Therefore they are able to develop a jointly planned international division of labor from which flows a closely coordinated system of trade, allocation of resources, currency exchange (in time, probably, a world socialist currency), scientific research, technological

development and the like. (The inherently competitive nature of capitalism makes it impossible for the imperialist countries to achieve such cooperation and coordination — a fact which has been demonstrated time and again and which will ultimately prove to be a strategic weakness in its attempts to forestall our epoch's historic transition to socialism.)

We are thus witnessing in our own lifetimes the beginning stages of one of the fundamental dramas of the socialist epoch — the resolution of what contemporary theoreticians in socialist countries identify as "a contradiction between the internationalization of the productive forces and the entire production that grows along with large-scale industry, and the remaining national-state organization of the economy and the entire social life of the socialist countries."\* (*Developed Socialism, Theory and Practice*, 1980, p. 240)

The resolution of this contradiction in an internationalist direction is historically inevitable. "As the various connections between the socialist countries deepen and improve, the laws and principles of the functioning of socialism as a social system must become the laws of the functioning and development of the system as a whole." (*ibid.*, p. 241.)

Over the long run of history, this process will lead to the gradual integration and assimilation of nations as the human race approaches fully developed communism. Such a prospect is alarming from a nationalist point of view which tends to equate singular national identity with the acme of human cultural development. From an internationalist standpoint, however, there is little basis for such fear and resistance. This point of view recognizes that over time socialism will produce new

\*There is, apparently, a still unsettled debate in Soviet theoretical circles as to whether or not this represents the "main" contradiction presently underlying development of the world socialist system. A recent study notes "another contradiction of the world socialist system that stems from the historical features of its development and directly affects the political relations of the socialist countries . . . that differences in the levels of their economic development and different time periods of movement along the socialist path, as well as peculiarities of the social structure and political organization of society, determine differences in the levels of socialism's maturity in these countries." (*ibid.*, p. 240.)

and more advanced political forms which will not only preserve all that is worthwhile from the past but will permit for the fullest flowering of a global human culture. Such a culture, with the final elimination of classes, will undoubtedly tend to be ideologically homogeneous; at the same time, given the vast differences of history and geography, not to mention individual personality, such a new civilization will abound with all the variety built into its human potential.

But this "vision" of the future is still quite distant and cannot simply be brought into being by an act of will. It can only develop — and no one can possibly predict the forms through which this will occur — as the result of historical processes which will consume entire epochs even after the complete destruction of imperialism.

Still, one cannot discuss the sovereignty of socialist countries without placing it in such a broad historical context. What the *Guardian* cavalierly labels the "revisionist doctrine of limited sovereignty" is, in fact, a law of socialist development which flows from the inescapable logic of the class struggle and the internal logic of the socialist mode of production itself.

To pose against this, as the *Guardian* does, "the right of each [socialist country] to independently develop its own social system" is nothing but an ideological cover for the subordination of the proletariat's overriding class interest to a petty bourgeois nationalist world outlook. Yes, every socialist country has the "right" to develop its social system with all its historically and nationally particular characteristics, but that "right" does not extend to the right to usher in a counter-revolutionary situation that threatens capitalist restoration, jeopardizes the victory of neighboring socialist countries or creates an opening for a full-scale imperialist attack on the whole socialist camp. Yes, every socialist country will have nationally specific features and conditions, but that cannot justify fostering open distrust, animosity or hostility toward other socialist countries or the socialist camp as a whole. National specificity cannot be used to justify abandonment of the cause of the international working class and the worldview of Marxism-Leninism.

The bitter irony in this debate is that if ever there was a case demonstrating the legitimacy and necessity for a doctrine of "limited sovereignty" as the political guide for the international

proletariat, it was the case of Pol Pot's Kampuchea. Here was a thoroughly renegade communist party whose policies had produced a domestic catastrophe bordering on genocide and one which was objectively threatening to destabilize the Vietnamese revolution; it thereby set the stage for U.S. imperialism's re-entry into Indochina in an attempt to snatch at least a partial victory from its most ignominious defeat ever. Furthermore, it was a party which had come to power not simply or mainly on the strength of its own national struggle but principally as a result of the anti-imperialist triumph in all of Indochina, in particular on the battlefields of Vietnam.

For the communists of Vietnam to have refrained from acting in the face of this rapidly deteriorating situation would have been politically irresponsible. (In hindsight, what is remarkable is the patience and prudence they displayed in the face of outright provocation.) But the party which wended its way through the military and political minefields of its 30-year war against French and U.S. imperialism proved itself once again equal to the task which history had imposed upon it.

And yet we can still count on our diehard Maoists "friends" in the U.S. to argue, as does the LRS, that "genuine internationalism means that communists should respect, support and not interfere in the affairs of other communists." (*Unity*, August 28, 1981.)

No matter what?

The only thing about this statement worth commending is that the LRS did not choose to use "proletarian" — only the appropriately classless "genuine" — to describe its version of "internationalism." This is nothing but a petty bourgeois view of internationalism (although it takes a certain amount of audacity to label it such). At bottom it stems from the idealized world of the small entrepreneur to whom the "right" to pursue one's own individually chosen vocation is the most fundamental of all rights, a right that takes precedence over all others. To the small entrepreneur, the function of society is to "respect" and "support" that right — certainly not to interfere with it.

Generalize this class viewpoint to the nation; transpose it onto the broader stage of international politics and we wind up with views — in the name of Marxism-Leninism, no less —

which see the absolutized "rights" of individual nations (and even individual communist parties) to pursue an independent course, regardless of the political content and consequences, described as the world outlook of the working class. It hardly seems necessary to explain why seeing to it that the "sovereignty" of such "communists" remains limited (both in principle and at times in practice) is a necessary and worthwhile contribution to the arsenal of Marxism-Leninism and the cause of socialism.

### Export of Revolution

Finally let us address one other variant of the same argument, likewise advanced in the name of Marxist-Leninist "principle," namely, that "You can't export revolution!"\*

On the surface this formulation is absolutely correct, but let us examine what is, and is not, meant by it. The statement that revolution cannot be exported is a concentrated expression of two important strategic points about the revolutionary process in the age of imperialism.

One is that revolution in any country is primarily the consequence of historically developed class contradictions which can no longer be resolved through the prevailing political and economic framework. For the communists to imagine that the working class can take state power short of such conditions — especially as the result of "outside" intervention — is thoroughly idealist. The law of uneven development has displayed time and again the truth that the objective conditions for revolution ripen at different paces in different countries. And if the objective conditions are not mature, there will not be a broad social revolution. Therefore revolution cannot be mechanically exported from one country to another, even if it is

\*Ironically, in the case of Kampuchea, this argument — which developed historically as a critique of ultra-left adventurism — was advanced to defend an ultra-left regime by the very same forces who earlier criticized the Soviet Union for "revisionism," to a great extent for not doing enough to "export revolution." While this fact alone is enough to make the polemic politically suspect, the point at issue is important enough in its own right to be dealt with seriously.

a neighboring country.

Second, the thesis that revolution cannot be exported is a central component of the line that peaceful coexistence between socialist and capitalist countries is both possible and desirable. In this sense, it is a serious (and not a bogus) statement of the political strategy of the international communist movement based on a materialist assessment of the conditions for revolutionary change world-wide. Where proletarian-led revolutions have triumphed and have begun the transition and consolidation of socialism, the international communist movement will expend all of its available resources in the defense of that revolution and its right to develop without imperialist intervention. This is the frontline battle (and significance) of the struggle for peaceful coexistence. In this manner the socialist community gradually expands and steadily strengthens, thereby simultaneously shrinking and weakening the imperialist camp. This in turn aggravates and accelerates the ripening of the internal contradictions of imperialism in other countries. And because of this the international communist movement and socialist camp have no need or compulsion to attempt to artificially accelerate the decline of imperialism or "export revolution."

On the other hand, to take the political thesis that revolution cannot be exported as a *statement of principle* that under no circumstances will the communists of one country act to assist or defend the revolutionary process in another country is totally opportunist. There are many circumstances in which indigenous popular support for revolutionary forces may not be enough to secure victory — especially when the center of world imperialism has undertaken to provide every conceivable manner of support, covert as well as overt — to the counter-revolution.

The point, of course, is that the Marxist-Leninist theses on the "export of revolution" are not statements of absolute "principle" but matters of political strategy. To marshal such an argument (when it is convenient, of course) to oppose the necessary internationalism and intervention of the communist movement — an internationalism which takes responsibility for the forward motion of the world-wide struggle for socialism — is an expression of the most insidious type of opportunism.

Of course, the concrete forms of "outside" assistance to any

revolutionary struggle will vary from case to case and constitute a complex and delicate matter of tactics, defying sweeping generalizations. In some instances assistance may be limited to helping revolutionary forces with their propaganda and diplomatic struggles. There may be direct or indirect financial aid. In a situation of an open and developed civil war, military aid might be provided in an overt or covert fashion. And in certain circumstances — and this is the main point of this particular debate — the armed forces of one revolution may very well be employed to directly assist the armed forces of another. None of this assistance can qualitatively substitute for the existence of an indigenous mass social base in support of the revolution and a vanguard political force prepared and capable of assuming responsibility for directing the revolution and winning the loyalty of the masses. In that sense also the thesis that revolution cannot be exported is absolutely correct. But it is a travesty of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice to interpret this to mean that the revolutionary forces of one country under no circumstances can be justified in coming to the aid (and at times even the rescue) of revolutionary forces of another country. (Again, where, how and when this can occur is a profoundly complex tactical question bound up with the whole prevailing international balance of forces, region of the world, etc.)

However, even if the essence of this argument were reduced to the platitude that socialism cannot be imposed on a people against their will, it is difficult to imagine how this "principle" could be invoked in defense of the Pol Pot regime. There can be little doubt that the particular "revolutionary" regime imposed on the people of Kampuchea by the KCP under Pol Pot's leadership enjoyed little popular support to begin with and virtually none by the time his government was overthrown; it probably constituted the grossest and most brutal caricature of socialism to emerge on the world scene to date.

Nevertheless, Pol Pot's genocidal reign of terror and his deliberate decimation of the ranks of the Kampuchean communist movement clearly made his ouster by the actions of Kampucheans alone impossible. And yet there are still those opportunists and philistines who argue that the intervention of a "non-Kampuchean" force to bring about Pol Pot's ouster, no matter how desirable that goal, compromised the project

beyond justification. (Do these same people think that the Nazis could have been driven from power by the sole actions of the German people — or that the populations of the countries occupied by the Nazis could have thrown off the occupation after the crippling genocide committed against them?)

In the politics of real life, Kampuchea faced only three options: continuation of the Pol Pot regime with the very real possibility that the people and the country would have been devastated to the point of extinction as a national entity; the return to power of anticommunist Khmers with the full support of the U.S. and Thailand; or, as did occur, a Vietnamese intervention capable of forcibly removing Pol Pot and helping establish a new revolutionary authority out of the surviving remnants of the opposition to Pol Pot from within the Kampuchean communist movement and from among the Kampuchean masses.

Given these concrete alternatives, for those who call themselves "communists" to impugn this last course on the grounds of the supposed "Marxist-Leninist principle" that "you can't export revolution" is as ideologically suspect as it is politically indefensible. What the Vietnamese action accomplished was not the "export" of a revolution, but the saving of a revolution and the prevention of a successful counter-revolution of massive consequence and proportions. Far from being a departure from Marxism-Leninism, it constituted another shining example of the kind of communist internationalism capable of foiling and ultimately defeating imperialism!

### Summary

The political point of this book, as stated at the outset, was to demonstrate that, from a working class point of view, recent events in Kampuchea from the latter part of 1978 until today can only be understood as a process in which Kampuchean and Vietnamese communists have undertaken to rescue the Kampuchean revolution.

But there has been another point to this undertaking as well; namely, to examine the ideological underpinnings of Maoism (and its related expressions of petty bourgeois nationalism) and to hold them up to the light of both "practical" politics and

Marxist theory so as to combat this virus which has deeply infected the communist movement in many countries in the past several decades. In registering the hope that this work may be able to make a useful contribution to these understandings, it is only appropriate to note that the main contribution to rescuing the Kampuchean revolution and combatting Maoism is already being objectively made on those crucial battlefronts of the international class struggle which daily demonstrate the reactionary political consequences of such retrograde ideological currents within the communist movement. In that sense, the communists of Indochina are once again making of their own revolutionary struggles an invaluable contribution to advancing the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism internationally.

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